

# **Philip Kerr and the Irish Question**

**Melanie Sayers**

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**University of Edinburgh**

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### **Declaration**

I declare that this work has been composed entirely by me and is completely my own work. No part of it has been submitted for any other degree.

Melanie Sayers

19 July 2010



## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the connection between Philip Kerr (1882-1940) and the Irish Question in the early twentieth century. To date there has been no substantial survey of his Irish policy. Through consultation of new sources the study explores the evolution of Kerr's thought on Ireland in light of his family, his faith, and his political background. Kerr's work on Ireland is particularly interesting as an imperialist, keen federalist, an admirer of the United States and not least as a Catholic who converted to Christian Science. The core of this piece explores Kerr's role in Irish affairs as Prime Minister David Lloyd George's secretary between 1916 and 1921, and the potentially influential role that he held at Downing Street. Although his biographers and historians have alluded to his involvement in the drafting of the 1920 Government of Ireland Bill, none have considered in detail the extent of the work that Kerr carried out in relation to Ireland between 1919 and 1921. The study addresses this by exploring Kerr's position as an individual who was not a statesman, but an influential figure close to the centre of power, who was closely involved with the various forces working to shape an Irish settlement. The thesis adds to the existing biographical literature on Kerr by anchoring him within the Anglo-Irish story. The fact that the Bill he drafted remained as the basis for the Government of Northern Ireland until 1972, and was not repealed until 1998, points to Kerr's modern relevance, and to the importance of recognising the work that he carried out behind the scenes during one of the most crucial periods in Anglo-Irish history.

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## Preface

While researching this project some of the early ideas were presented at several conferences. A paper exploring the transatlantic elements to Kerr's work on Ireland was presented at the annual conference of the Transatlantic Studies Association, in Dundee, June 2008. This was subsequently published as a chapter entitled 'Philip Kerr, The Irish Question, and Anglo-American Relations, 1916-1921' in the volume *Lord Lothian and Anglo-American Relations, 1900-1940* edited by Priscilla Roberts and published by Republic of Letters, Leiden. The ideas introduced in this piece appear in a more developed and conclusive form in this thesis. Most recently a paper exploring Kerr's connection with W.E. Gladstone's Home Rule legacy was delivered at the University College Dublin's Gladstone Bicentennial Conference, Hawarden, in September 2009. This will appear in the forthcoming volume of the conference proceedings, edited by Mary Daly and published by the Four Courts Press. I am grateful to all those who expressed an interest in my research and offered different perspectives.

I have been very fortunate in my supervision over the last few years. I am deeply indebted to Professor Alvin Jackson, who encouraged me when I first expressed a wish to undertake PhD research. I am grateful not only for his continued belief in this project, but for his guidance, support and patience throughout my postgraduate studies. Owen Dudley Edwards has been an inspiration throughout my time at Edinburgh. He has always been extremely generous with his time and advice, and our meetings have been both enlightening and entertaining. I am grateful to him for helping me to interpret Philip Kerr's life and work in ways I might not otherwise have considered. This work benefitted from conversations with Dr. Ewen Cameron, while still in its early stages. My thanks are also due to Professor Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones and Professor Priscilla Roberts for their interest in my work, their assistance and kindness.

I am grateful to the Rt. Hon. Michael Ancram, the Thirteenth Marquess of Lothian, for allowing me to consult the papers kept at Monteviot House in Jedburgh, and to Mr. Angus, not only for making this possible, but for his kindness to me during my time researching there. I wish to thank the staff, archivists and librarians at the following institutions: the National Archives of Scotland, the National Library of Scotland, the Parliamentary Archives, the British Library, the British Library Newspaper Archive at Colindale, the Bodleian Library, the John Rylands Library at the University of Manchester, and the University of Reading Library. The Justin Arbuthnott Award assisted with much of the London-based research and I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to the trustees.

The encouragement and support of friends has been greatly valued. Special mention must go to Bernard Kelly, Kirsty Carswell, Angela Rae and Kristyn Sharp. My fellow postgraduate students, who are too many to mention, have made this experience everything and more that I hoped it would be. My family have supported me in every way imaginable. Above all love and thanks to Lynn, Alan and Laura who have, in a sense, lived with Philip Kerr as long as I have. Jack Thank you.

## Chapter 1

### Philip Kerr and the Historiography of Modern Ireland

Philip Kerr (later the Eleventh Marquess of Lothian) was closely involved in the Irish question and worked on it between 1916 and 1921, some of the most turbulent years in Anglo-Irish political history.<sup>1</sup> Although scholarly works have explored Kerr's life and career, and there is an extensive body of literature on Anglo-Irish relations, there has been no detailed study linking Kerr to Ireland and an exploration of the work that he did. As private secretary to the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, Kerr drafted the 1920 Government of Ireland Bill and exercised a great deal of influence in Irish policy. He therefore has a significant place within the history of Irish Home Rule and Anglo-Irish relations. This chapter will consider the existing literature, highlighting the current gaps and the need for this thesis to fill them.

The Irish problem has fascinated historians and enthusiasts alike as the story has continued to unfold and to develop throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century. It has inspired a popular culture and folklore as the Easter rebels have remained in the public consciousness in a cult and almost saint-like way. Films such as Neil Jordan's *Michael Collins* have ensured that revolutionaries such as Collins remain heroic, iconic figures. This culture is clearly not diminishing as Ken Loach's film *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* won 'Best Film' at Cannes in 2006.<sup>2</sup>

Inspiration for this thesis developed from recognition of the fact that Kerr drafted the 1920 Government of Ireland Bill that partitioned the country and in effect created

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<sup>1</sup> As Kerr did not become the Eleventh Lord Lothian until 1930, after the period that this study is chiefly concerned with, he will be referred to as Philip Kerr throughout.

<sup>2</sup> Neil Jordan (Director), *Michael Collins* (Warner Bros., 1996); Ken Loach (Director), *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* (BIM, 2006).

Northern Ireland as we know it today. He did this as private secretary to Lloyd George in 1916-21. Historically Lloyd George is closely linked to both the Irish settlement of 1920 and to the deal that was reached in the form of the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty. During this time Kerr was one of his closest aides and advisors, and yet he has been largely ignored by historians of Anglo-Irish history.

During the 1980s numerous works appeared that examined the British administration of Ireland during the last stages of the union. These included Sheila Lawlor's *Britain and Ireland 1914-23*, John McColgan's *British Policy and the Irish Administration, 1920-22* and Eunan O'Halpin's *Decline of the Union: British Government in Ireland 1892-1920*.<sup>3</sup> Each of these explored different aspects of the union's decline. Whilst Lawlor provided a detailed account of the events and actions of the leading political players, McColgan analysed the practical elements of the settlement including the provisions of the Government of Ireland Bill, the financial and administrative aspects, and the transfer of services to Northern Ireland. O'Halpin focused on the role played by the Crown Officials at Dublin Castle in the Irish administration, and the relationship between government departments in Ireland and parliament. In doing so he aimed to illustrate the administrative legacy inherited by independent Ireland. None of these works made any reference to Kerr and the role that he played, despite the fact that (as this thesis will argue) he was a central figure in the development of the 1920 Act and its implementation.

In 1991 Nicholas Mansergh published *The Unresolved Question: the Anglo-Irish Settlement and its Undoing*.<sup>4</sup> He gave a detailed account of the making of the settlement, its aftermath and the way in which it fell apart with the suspension of

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<sup>3</sup> Sheila Lawlor, *Britain and Ireland 1914-23* (Dublin, 1983); John McColgan, *British Policy and the Irish Administration, 1920-22* (London, 1983); Eunan O'Halpin, *Decline of the Union: British Government in Ireland 1892-1920* (Dublin, 1987).

<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Mansergh, *The Unresolved Question: the Anglo-Irish Settlement and its Undoing 1912-72* (London, 1991).

Stormont in 1972. Like the works produced in the 1980s, Mansergh failed to acknowledge Kerr's involvement. Further works by Michael Laffan and Francis Costello, published in 1999 and 2003 respectively, provide valuable information on Irish politics during the period that Kerr was at Downing Street, yet once again he is not included in either analysis. Costello's *The Irish Revolution and its Aftermath 1916-1923, Years of Revolt* provides a fresh approach to the events of 1916-23 through wider consideration of the social and economic factors that contributed to the political developments, hence presenting a broader study of the period.<sup>5</sup> Laffan's *The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Féin Party, 1916-1923* explores the rise of Sinn Féin from its earliest beginnings, to the strength the party gathered post 1916.<sup>6</sup> Kerr would be concerned by Sinn Féin's growing strength while working on Irish matters and therefore Laffan's work provides a valuable context. While it is clear that historians continue to search for fresh interpretations of the Anglo-Irish relationship, there is a historical paradox in the sense that Kerr's involvement has not been explored.

The first decade of the twenty-first century has seen a number of works refer to Kerr in an Irish context, hinting at his potential importance but not exploring it in detail. In *Home Rule, An Irish History 1800-2000* Alvin Jackson refers to Kerr's possible influence on the making of the 1920 Government of Ireland Bill.<sup>7</sup> He explains that the federalist agitation was an important context for the legislation that was being drafted in 1919-20, stating that:

Philip Kerr, Private Secretary to Lloyd George, was an imperialist in the style of Milner, and a federalist, and while he was a relatively early convert to the

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<sup>5</sup> Francis Costello, *The Irish Revolution and its Aftermath 1916-1923, Years of Revolt* (Dublin, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Michael Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Féin Party, 1916-1923* (Cambridge, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule, An Irish History 1800-2000* (London, 2004).

notion of dominion status for Ireland, he also influenced and sponsored the deal that was being honed in 1919-20.<sup>8</sup>

Jackson points to a need to examine Kerr's role in depth and to determine exactly what his position and involvement were in relation to Ireland during these years. The work itself provides important background material for this study as it charts the history of the Home Rule idea in Ireland over a two hundred year period and the development of schemes for devolution.

The only piece to date that has attempted to highlight Kerr's involvement with the Irish question in any substantial way is Gary Peatling's *British Opinion and Irish Self-Government 1865-1925*.<sup>9</sup> Peatling defines three distinct ideological groups in exploring British attitudes to Ireland: the Comtean Positivists, the New Liberals and the Imperialists. He explores Kerr's role under the imperialist heading, explaining that he assisted in the drafting of the Government of Ireland Act. Peatling links Kerr to the search for a settlement in Ireland and goes further than previous scholars in attempting to define his thought, demonstrating that he gave advice to Lloyd George and the fact that Kerr listened to advice from the Protestant Irish Nationalist Stephen Gwynn. Despite this there are some problems with his work. He argues that Catholics in the United Kingdom were often unsympathetic to imperial goals and that families such as Philip Kerr's were troubled by this association. This was not necessarily the case, as Chapter 2 will explore, and certainly Kerr's family did not fall into this category. Peatling's work is important in linking Kerr to Anglo-Irish politics, although his involvement requires more wide-ranging investigation.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>9</sup> G.K. Peatling, *British Opinion and Irish Self-Government 1865-1925* (Dublin, 2001).

The most up to date work that has made reference to Kerr's role in the wider context of Anglo-Irish history is Paul Bew's *Ireland: The Politics of Enmity 1789-2006*.<sup>10</sup> Bew refers to the fact that civil servants at Dublin Castle, such as Sir John Anderson and Andy Cope, worked closely with Kerr in 1920. This will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 6. Considering the fact that many historians writing about the 1920 Government of Ireland Bill have omitted Kerr as a significant figure, it is all the more important that Bew has included him. As his work explores a wider context, it suggests that historians are beginning to recognise Kerr as someone who belongs in the Anglo-Irish narrative. Bew has also referred to Kerr in articles discussing the involvement of American journalist, Carl W. Ackerman, in the Irish problem 1920-21 and the role of moderate Irish nationalism between 1916 and 1923.<sup>11</sup>

There is thus a strong case for undertaking a full and detailed study of Kerr's connection with Ireland. Indeed his involvement is important for a number of reasons. His papers housed in the National Archives of Scotland reveal that he was handling a vast amount of Irish related material between 1917 and 1921, as do the papers of Lloyd George in the Parliamentary Archives.<sup>12</sup> Despite this, his involvement and influence have not been fully apparent. This can be partly explained by the fact that Kerr maintained a physical, daily presence at Downing Street in 1917-21; therefore there is a lack of correspondence between him and his contemporaries as he would have seen the Prime Minister, government ministers and fellow civil servants regularly.<sup>13</sup> One of the few contemporary sources that points to Kerr's

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<sup>10</sup> Paul Bew, *Ireland: The Politics of Enmity 1789-2006* (Oxford, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Paul Bew, 'Moderate Irish Nationalism and the Irish Revolution, 1916-1923' in *The Historical Journal* Vol. 42, No. 3, (Sept, 1999); Paul Bew 'Collins and Adams, LG and Blair' in *The Spectator*, 31 May 1997.

<sup>12</sup> Private and Political Papers of Philip Kerr, the Eleventh Marquess of Lothian, GD40/17; The Lloyd George Papers, First Earl Lloyd George of Dwyfor, LG.

<sup>13</sup> Kerr was appointed as one of Lloyd George's private secretaries in 1916. He was handling Irish material from January 1917.



influence in Irish policy is the published volume of the Mark Sturgis diaries, edited by Michael Hopkinson.<sup>14</sup> This will be explored in more detail in Chapter 6. As a member of the Dublin Castle administration in 1920-22, Sturgis noted Kerr's influence with Lloyd George and also with the Chief Secretary for Ireland, Sir Hamar Greenwood.

The papers reveal that Kerr was corresponding with a wide range of individuals linked to the Irish question, particularly between 1919 and 1921. These included figures such as Stephen Gwynn, Horace Plunkett and G.W. Russell. Gwynn published extensively during his life, as did his son Denis. Both produced biographies of the Irish Parliamentary Party leader, John Redmond.<sup>15</sup> Neither mentioned Kerr in their work. This may have been difficult while Kerr was still alive as he met Gwynn in secret in 1919-21. Stephen Gwynn has not been the subject of substantial historical work, although a recent PhD on him has been completed by Colin Reid, shortly to be published by Manchester University Press. There are numerous biographies of Plunkett and Russell, but again Kerr is omitted.<sup>16</sup> Equally, the biographies of Sir Edward Carson do not connect him with Kerr, although the Round Table tried to convince Carson of a federal solution to the Irish problem during the Ulster Crisis in 1912-14.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Hopkinson (ed.), *Last Days of Dublin Castle: The Mark Sturgis Diaries* (Dublin, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> Stephen Gwynn, *John Redmond's Last Years* (London, 1919); Denis Gwynn, *The Life of John Redmond* (London, 1932).

<sup>16</sup> Margaret Digby, *Horace Plunkett. An Anglo-American Irishman* (Oxford, 1949); Trevor West, *Horace Plunkett Co-operation and Politics an Irish Biography* (Gerrards Cross, 1986).

<sup>16</sup> H. Summerfield, *That myriad-minded man a biography of George William Russell 'A.E.', 1867-1935* (Gerrards Cross, 1975). Further works include Robert Bernard Davis, *George William Russell ('AE')* (London, 1977); Alan Denson, *Letters from AE* (London, 1961); Darrell Figgis, *AE Russell, A Study of a Man and a Nation* (Dublin, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> Works on Carson include: H.M. Hyde, *Carson, the Life of Sir Edward Carson* (London, 1974); Alvin Jackson, *Sir Edward Carson* (Dundalk, 1993); Geoffrey Lewis, *Carson: the Man who Divided Ireland* (London, 2005); S.E. Long, *Man For Ulster, Carson* (Dromera, 1969); A.T.Q. Stewart, *Edward Carson* (Belfast, 1997). Works on Wilson include: C.E. Callwell, *Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, His Life and Diaries* (London, 1927); Keith Jeffery (ed.), *The military correspondence of Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson 1918-1922* (London, 1985); Keith Jeffery, *Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson: a Political Soldier* (Oxford, 2006).

Although various notable works describe the British government's handling of Ireland while Kerr was secretary to Lloyd George, they often do not refer to him or link him to Irish matters. Volumes such as R.B. McDowell's *The Irish Convention*, or D.George Boyce's *Englishmen and Irish Troubles: British Public Opinion and the Making of Irish Policy 1918-22*, describe matters on which Kerr worked. He was not directly involved with the Irish Convention of 1917-18, but he did help to arrange it. Kerr was also aware of the power of press opinion. Despite this, these works do not make any reference to him. Occasionally there are references to Kerr in the earlier literature that suggest his work on Ireland requires further investigation. In his biography of Erskine Childers, Andrew Boyle wrote that Childers received an introduction to Kerr through the social reformer Mrs Beatrice Webb.<sup>18</sup> Childers was an Englishman with Irish roots. He was director of Sinn Féin propaganda 1919-21, secretary to the Irish delegation during the Anglo-Irish negotiations, and executed in 1922 as a traitor by the Irish Free State. Meanwhile, Webb's journals have been edited with consequent biographies.<sup>19</sup> She met Kerr when Lloyd George invited her to join a reconstruction committee in 1917 addressing social problems in the United Kingdom. Webb recorded in her diary: 'there is the attractive young leader of the Round Table group – Philip Kerr – one of the Prime Minister's secretaries'.<sup>20</sup> She went on to make scathing remarks about each member of the committee, declaring that 'The Committee itself is not promising' and attacking Kerr saying 'Philip Kerr, an ultra-refined aristocratic dreamer, with sentimentally revolutionary views, spends what little time and thought he has over from secretarial work for the Prime Minister

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<sup>18</sup> Andrew Boyle, *The Riddle of Erskine Childers* (London, 1977) p. 252.

<sup>19</sup> Margaret Cole, *Beatrice Webb* (London, 1945); Kitty Muggeridge and Ruth Adam, *Beatrice Webb, A Life 1858-1943* (London, 1967).

<sup>20</sup> Margaret I. Cole (ed.), *Beatrice Webb's Diaries 1912-1924* (London, 1952) p. 81.

in devising phrases and formulas to express standards of perfection'.<sup>21</sup> As a Fabian it is possible that she was able to introduce Childers to Kerr through the wife of Desmond FitzGerald, Mabel FitzGerald, who had been a secretary to George Bernard Shaw (another prominent Fabian). Desmond FitzGerald, along with Childers, was responsible for the Irish side of the propaganda war during the fight for independence.<sup>22</sup>

Kerr was involved in many political issues during his time at Downing Street, especially matters relating to the war and, later, the Versailles peace talks. As a result the accounts and memoirs of contemporaries have not linked him firmly with Irish policy. There is a body of literature on the Chairman of the Cabinet Committee on Ireland, Walter Long. Kerr was secretary to the Committee, which also devised the 1920 Government of Ireland Bill. Long had developed interests in a federal settlement for Ireland from around 1918. He published his memoirs in 1923, but again there is no suggestion of Kerr's role in the Irish question.<sup>23</sup> Nor is there much insight on him in Charles Petrie's biography of Long, published in 1936, or in John Kendle's later work on his involvement in the Irish settlement.<sup>24</sup> The memoirs of Winston Churchill, the diaries of both Christopher Addison and Maurice Hankey, and the most recent biography of F.E. Smith, all provide vital background information to a turbulent political time.<sup>25</sup> They do not, however, inform us of Kerr's daily presence at Downing Street in 1917-21, and his involvement with Ireland. The diaries of Thomas

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>22</sup> Fitzgerald's memoirs were published by his son Fergus: Fergus Fitzgerald (ed.), *The Memoirs of Desmond Fitzgerald 1913-1916* (London, 1968).

<sup>23</sup> Walter Long, *Memories* (London, 1923).

<sup>24</sup> Charles Petrie, *Walter Long and his Times* (London 1936); John Kendle, *Walter Long, Ireland and the Union, 1905-1920* (Montreal 1992). See also Alvin Jackson, 'Long, Walter Hume, first Viscount Long (1854-1924)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, May 2009.

<sup>25</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis 1911-1918* (London, 1968); *Christopher Addison, Four and a half years. A personal diary from June 1914 to January 1919* (London, 1934); Stephen Roskill, *Hankey: Man of Secrets 1877-1918* (London, 1970); Stephen Roskill, *Hankey: Man of Secrets 1919-1931* (London, 1972); John Campbell, *F.E. Smith, first Earl of Birkenhead* (London, 1983).

Jones are a more accurate illustration of Kerr's position, as he made various references to Kerr in his entries. Jones' diaries are a particularly useful source for historians of the period as he kept detailed accounts of events at Whitehall between 1916 and 1930, published in three volumes.<sup>26</sup> The third dealt purely with Ireland. The diaries provide a remarkable insight into happenings within government during this period. Although Jones's Irish volume is largely concerned with the Anglo-Irish negotiations that took place when Kerr had left Downing Street to edit *The Daily Chronicle*, it is clear that the latter still maintained a presence after his departure.

Kerr joined Lloyd George's service as a member of the new wartime administration set up by the Prime Minister to handle the expanding workload of the government. John Turner's *Lloyd George's Secretariat* examines the machinery set up by Lloyd George in 1916 in order to explore what the author describes as 'the curious and neglected world where politics and administration intersect'.<sup>27</sup> This body was described as the 'Garden Suburb' in reference to the secretariat's temporary offices in the Downing Street Garden. Turner attempts to explore what the aims of establishing the Garden Suburb were, how innovative it was and how far these aims were actually carried out. He recognises the importance of the secretariat in the formation of policy in areas such as Ireland. He explains that, until the secretariat disbanded, it was W.G.S. Adams who was most closely involved with the Irish issue. Turner does, however, try to define Kerr's position on the Irish question, although it should be emphasised that this only relates to the years up to the end of the war. Turner makes it clear that Kerr's opinions on Ireland were shaped by his imperial philosophy and belief in federal devolution, and argues that he was preoccupied with

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<sup>26</sup> Keith Middlemass (ed.), *Thomas Jones, Whitehall Diary, Vol. I, 1916-1925* (London, 1969); *Thomas Jones, Whitehall Diary, Vol. II, 1926-1930* (London, 1969); *Thomas Jones, Whitehall Diary, Vol. III, Ireland 1918-1925* (London, 1971).

<sup>27</sup> John Turner, *Lloyd George's Secretariat* (Cambridge, 1980), p. 1.

moral analysis, while his rejection of the Catholic Church made him incapable of dispassionate judgement in Irish matters. He suggests that although Kerr's detachment from Ireland lent certain clarity to his thoughts, he failed to recognise the frustration felt within Ireland towards the British government's slow response to the situation. These ideas will be explored further in due course. Clearly Turner's work is concerned primarily with the secretariat throughout the duration of the war. Nonetheless his volume is a valuable piece that contextualises Kerr's role with regard to Ireland in the years 1916 to 1918.

Lloyd George's coalition government has been the subject of a comprehensive study by Kenneth O. Morgan.<sup>28</sup> In *Consensus and Disunity* Morgan explores the coalition's place in British history and the implications that it had for the development of British politics. He explores the developments in the Irish question within this context, arguing that the approach of the coalition to Ireland in this period 'was highly ambiguous'.<sup>29</sup> He states that 'Fisher [H.A.L. Fisher] and Kerr formally drafted a Home Rule Bill'. There are no further details, however, of Kerr's role. Morgan argues that Edward Grigg, 'free from Kerr's brand of exotic mysticism, enjoyed less scope than had his predecessor' when describing his replacement of Kerr as Lloyd George's private secretary.<sup>30</sup> Indeed Morgan seems to suggest that it was due to the nature of the wartime coalition that Kerr had enjoyed greater latitude in serving Lloyd George. He states that later members of Lloyd George's entourage were 'functionaries on a lower level from the body of advisors such as Adams, Kerr, and

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<sup>28</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity, The Lloyd George Coalition Government 1918-1922* (Oxford, 1979).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 260.

Astor who surrounded the leader in 1917-18', suggesting that Kerr's role is in need of further attention by historians.<sup>31</sup>

Kerr's relationship with Lloyd George is important in any attempt to understand his potential influence in Irish policy. The literature surrounding the Prime Minister is vast. As a historical figure, he has remained a fascinating and highly complex character. Aside from his own writings on the war and subsequent peace talks, there are countless biographies, as well as memoirs by those who knew and worked with him.<sup>32</sup> His role in the Irish settlement of 1921, and the events leading up to it, has been widely documented. Yet the current literature does not adequately convey the full importance of Kerr's presence at Downing Street during these years and his relationship with the Prime Minister. Biographers and contemporaries have certainly made reference to Kerr's relationship with Lloyd George. Frank Owen wrote that Kerr was 'one of the few outstanding men in British public life who worked with Lloyd George and never quarrelled with him right up till the end'.<sup>33</sup> He did, however, acknowledge the controversy surrounding their working relationship. Owen referred to the resentment of Kerr by the Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon, as he would often have to discuss foreign policy through Kerr rather than directly with the Prime Minister. Owen argued that Curzon had genuine grounds for complaint as Kerr's role

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Lloyd George published his *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George* (London, 1933-1936). The comprehensive biographies include Bentley Gilbert, *David Lloyd George: A Political Life: The Architect of Change, 1863-1912* (London, 1987); *David Lloyd George: A Political Life: The Organizer of Victory, 1912-1916* (London, 1987); John Grigg's volumes cover Lloyd George's career up until the 1918 Armistice, these include *The Young Lloyd George* (London, 1973); *Lloyd George: The People's Champion 1902-1911* (London 1978); *Lloyd George: From Peace to War 1912-1916* (London, 1985); *Lloyd George: War Leader 1916-1918* (London, 2002). Frank Owen's *Tempestuous Journey, Lloyd George His Life and Times* (London, 1954) is a classic narrative of Lloyd George's career. Among those individuals who were close to Lloyd George, the memoirs of Frances Stevenson and A.J. Sylvester are particularly useful in providing an insight into his complex character. See Frances Louise, Countess Lloyd George, *The Years That Are Past* (London, 1967); A.J.P. Taylor (ed.), *Lloyd George, A Diary by Frances Stevenson* (London, 1971); A.J.P. Taylor (ed.), *My Darling Pussy: The Letters of Lloyd George and Frances Stevenson 1913-41* (London, 1975); A.J. Sylvester, *The Real Lloyd George* (London, 1947). Sylvester's diary was published later, edited by Colin Cross, *Life with Lloyd George the diary of A.J. Sylvester, 1931-45* (London, 1975).

<sup>33</sup> Frank Owen, *Tempestuous Journey* p. 407.

as a 'liaison' officer at the Foreign Office would have been humiliating to the Foreign Secretary.<sup>34</sup> Kerr's friend, Edward Grigg, also pointed to some of the controversy surrounding the former's position, referring to him as 'one of the most influential figures in his [Lloyd George's] entourage'.<sup>35</sup> Describing Kerr's natural ease with people of all backgrounds Grigg argued that 'Such a man was naturally attractive to, and attracted by, Lloyd George. Before entering Lloyd George's service he was, if anything, a Conservative; thereafter he was a Liberal for the rest of his life'.<sup>36</sup> It is difficult, however, to determine which man had the greater influence on the other. On the news of Kerr's death Lloyd George paid tribute to him in the Commons saying that he had been his constant comrade during the darkest periods of the war. He said that:

He was a man of remarkable abilities...the depth and breadth of his intellectual capacity impressed some of the greatest men of that day – Clemenceau, President Wilson, Veniselos – that galaxy of great men. They were very impressed with Philip Kerr and treated him, not as the Prime Minister's secretary, but as if he were an emissary to the Conference, and a very important one.<sup>37</sup>

Regardless of the controversy surrounding their relationship, the two men worked closely together during a critical period in history and Lloyd George relied heavily on Kerr as his private secretary. The study will draw on this relationship in assessing the latter's influence on Irish policy.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 406.

<sup>35</sup> John Grigg, *Lloyd George, War Leader 1916-1918* p. 231.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Edward Grigg, 'Philip Kerr, Marquess of Lothian' in *The Round Table* (March, 1941) no. 122 pp. 197-220; *The Times* 20 December 1940, p. 2, column 3-4.



So far this review has concentrated on the literature surrounding Kerr's time at Downing Street as this is the main focus of this study. Yet his life and career are a crucial element in determining his attitude and approach to Ireland. Kerr was an interesting figure in his own right and in recent decades he has been the subject of scholarly work. Much of the focus of this rests on his membership of the 'Round Table Movement for Imperial Federation', his drafting of the 'war guilt clause' in the Treaty of Versailles, his interviews with Hitler in the 1930s, and his position as the British Ambassador to the United States in 1939-40. He was an intriguing individual: his father, Lord Ralph Kerr, was the third son of the Seventh Marquess of Lothian and his mother, Lady Anne Fitzalan-Howard, was the daughter of the Fourteenth Duke of Norfolk. The Kerrs were a prominent landed Scottish family, while the Howards were perhaps the most powerful landed family in England. Both the Kerrs and the Howards were Catholics and traditionally Unionists. Yet Philip would later break with the family expectations by converting to Christian Science in 1923, and by eventually claiming to be a Lloyd George Liberal.<sup>38</sup> Kerr was a firm imperialist with federal interests and he maintained a life-long interest in the United States and in forging strong transatlantic relations. These characteristics would bring an interesting dimension to his work on Ireland and make him an asset to Lloyd George.

To date there are only two significant biographies of Kerr. The first, published in 1960, was J.R.M. Butler's *Lord Lothian (Philip Kerr) 1882-1940*, and the more recent work, *Lothian: Philip Kerr and the Quest for World Order* by David P. Billington, was published in 2006.<sup>39</sup> Butler's work was produced as the official biography of Kerr, as requested by the Lothian trustees. His volume presents his subject in a favourable light. The author wrote in his introduction that he admired Kerr greatly,

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<sup>38</sup> Christian Science was founded by Mrs Mary Baker Eddy in 1879.

<sup>39</sup> J.R.M. Butler, *Lord Lothian (Philip Kerr) 1882-1940* (London, 1960); David P. Billington, *Lothian: Philip Kerr and the Quest for World Order* (Westport, 2006).



although he did not know him well. He attempted to provide an overview of Kerr's life and work rather than a critical assessment of his contribution to political affairs. The biography is arranged thematically, rather than in strict chronological order, discussing Kerr's family background, imperial philosophy and political career. In describing Kerr's time as private secretary to the Prime Minister, Butler provides a useful overview of his involvement in government affairs during this time. But he went into very little detail regarding Kerr's involvement in the Irish question, referring to it within two short paragraphs. He noted that his subject did not believe that dominion Status would solve the problem in Ireland and that 'Kerr had been commissioned by his chief in April [1921] to restate "the whole government policy" in a reply to the Irish Bishops'. These statements only highlight the necessity for further exploration of Kerr's role.

The biography by David P. Billington is a much more thorough and critical account of Kerr's life and work and is perhaps the most important piece of literature on him to date. Billington has made extensive use of the archives in order to present a detailed study of Kerr and his influence in world politics. In particular he addresses the 'problem of national sovereignty', with which his subject was concerned, especially in the latter part of his career. Kerr believed that state sovereignty ultimately led to war, and a 'World Commonwealth of Nations' was a possible solution to this, although he never defined how this vision would come into being. Kerr looked to the United States and to the United Kingdom to join forces in leading the way. The author uses these themes as the basis for his study. Billington addresses Kerr's role in Irish affairs, first as a member of 'The Round Table', and later as secretary to Lloyd George, but there is a great deal more to be said in relation to Kerr's approach to the Irish question, and some of the judgements are open to debate.

The author argues that ‘Kerr almost to the end saw Ireland through a Round Table lens’ which does not adequately summarise the work that he did in relation to Ireland and the influence that he potentially had.<sup>40</sup> This study aims to build on this in a much more thorough way, exploring not only Kerr’s involvement but also broader thematic areas such as the influence of American connections to the Irish problem and the role of religion in Kerr’s approach. Scholars to date have failed fully to acknowledge the range of contacts that Kerr had and the various ways in which he worked on the Irish problem.

Until the publication of Billington’s biography in 2006 the most valuable study of Kerr’s role in British and world politics was *The Larger Idea, Lord Lothian and the Problem of National Sovereignty*, edited by John Turner.<sup>41</sup> It remains an extremely useful volume as the contributors, individually and as a whole, help to build a picture of his varied career and his contribution to world politics through specific essays relating to his work. The volume highlights Kerr’s historical importance in a number of areas. As the inside cover notes, ‘Though never a statesman of rank, he [Kerr] was never far from the centre of power’, underlining the need to explore his influence in more detail. Published in 1988, the contributors assess Kerr in his various roles during his career, including his time at 10 Downing Street, his involvement with India, as British Ambassador in America, and his contribution to federalist thought. Kerr and Ireland are discussed briefly within the chapter assessing his time at Downing Street but there is little detail provided. The few pages dealing with this aspect are useful nonetheless: John Turner and Michael Dockrill discuss his involvement in a very concise and clear way. They consider Kerr’s opinions on Ireland in roughly two periods: before and after the war. Kerr’s support for

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<sup>40</sup> David P. Billington, *Lothian: Philip Kerr and the Quest for World Order* (Westport, 2006) p. 68.

<sup>41</sup> John Turner, *The Larger Idea, Lord Lothian and the Problem of National Sovereignty* (London, 1988).

conscription in Ireland, his mistrust of the extreme nationalists and his belief in federalism as a solution to Ireland's problems are all considered. Dockrill and Turner describe Kerr's attitude after the war as having been more concerned with how the Irish problem appeared to the wider world, rather than specific Irish policy. It is clear from this that Kerr played an important role during the post-war years, advising Lloyd George and conducting interviews for him with intermediaries such as Colonel E.M. House and Archbishop Patrick Clune. Above all else, Kerr is described as having been influential in the committee that drafted the 1920 Government of Ireland Act. This points to his importance in driving Irish policy.

A more personal view of Kerr can be obtained from the memoirs by Edward Grigg and Robert Brand written for the *Round Table* Journal in the years following his death in 1940. In the March 1941 edition Grigg gave an account of Kerr's life and an affectionate presentation of his character. He described a typical first impression of Kerr as 'one of natural friendliness and ease' and wrote that he had not the slightest touch of aloofness or constraint with anyone he met, regardless of their race, language or colour.<sup>42</sup> Grigg described Kerr's reputation for untidiness, observing that this attitude towards his dress and his unconventionality added to his attractiveness. The article provides an insight into the man as his friends knew him, his love of cars, of air travel, scenery, skill at golf and interest in people. Written only a few months after Kerr's death Grigg attempted to provide a detailed sketch of the former's life, career and personality. Brand's article, written some years later in 1960 shortly after the publication of Butler's *Lord Lothian*, aimed simply to provide some further personal memories of Kerr as his friend and colleague.<sup>43</sup> He however attempted to address

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<sup>42</sup> Edward Grigg, 'Philip Kerr, Marquess of Lothian' in *The Round Table* (March, 1941) no. 122, pp. 207-208.

<sup>43</sup> R.H. Brand, 'Philip Kerr, Some Personal Memories' in *The Round Table* (June, 1960) Vol. 50, pp. 234-243.

some of the criticism aimed at Kerr following the publication of Butler's biography and to explain some of the mysteries that appeared to surround him, namely Kerr's power behind the scenes of government and his conversion to Christian Science.

In particular Brand disagreed with Winston Churchill's claims in his speech following Kerr's death in 1940 that he was 'dignified', 'ensorious' or ever gave the impression of 'aristocratic detachment'.<sup>44</sup> Rather, he confirmed Grigg's view that Kerr was charming and natural with everyone he met, regardless of the class or society to which they belonged. Brand believed Kerr to have been frank and open without a trace of cynicism. He insisted that the prospect of inheriting the Lothian title and the great estates that came with it were distasteful to him, although when he did succeed to the Marquessate he was concerned with the welfare of his tenants and was very proud of the houses and parks he owned. Disputing Churchill's claim that Kerr was 'ensorious', Brand claimed that he was extremely open-minded and generous towards others. The author presented an attractive character, recalling a letter that he (Brand) had written to his mother from South Africa in 1906, commenting of Philip that 'Most women fall in love with him sooner or later, as far as my experience goes'.<sup>45</sup>

In reference to Raymond Mortimer's claim that Kerr possessed a power behind the scenes that no person should be allowed to possess, Brand opined that Mortimer could have only been referring to Kerr's years as Lloyd George's secretary, and if this was true then it was the fault of Lloyd George and not Kerr. Clearly, years after Kerr's time at Downing Street there was still a sense that he had been highly influential despite not having been part of the government. Brand did not shy away from these issues in his tribute, also addressing the criticism of Kerr regarding his drafting of the

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 234-235.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 236.

war guilt clause in the Treaty of Versailles and his appeasing attitude towards Hitler. Brand acknowledged that he had disagreed with Kerr's views on Germany in the run-up to the Second World War. Kerr had argued that Germany was encircled and must have colonies in order to live. Brand, on the other hand, had spent time in Germany during Hitler's rise to power and saw the country in a different light. He also understood that Kerr may have felt remorse, having drafted the harsh terms directed at Germany in the Treaty of Versailles. Brand believed that Kerr may have wished to make amends.<sup>46</sup>

Brand admitted that religion was one area of Kerr's life that did evoke a sense of mystery. He argued that it was due to the teachings instilled in him at the Roman Catholic Oratory School in Birmingham that he never married and maintained a need for spirituality throughout his life. Yet had apparently developed doubts about Catholicism while studying at Oxford. Brand singled out the works of George Bernard Shaw as having contributed to these doubts. Kerr was introduced to Christian Science by Nancy Astor in 1914 while recovering from acute appendicitis and followed its teachings until the end of his life. It seems that he had confided in Brand a great deal during his struggles with Catholicism, and although the latter acknowledged that he had no understanding of Kerr's new faith, and that none of the Round Table group joined Kerr in his conversion, they did not try to dissuade him from becoming a Christian Scientist.

The accounts of Kerr written by both Grigg and Brand are partial in the sense that they were among his closest friends. Their tributes however provide valuable insights into his personality rather than his role in the affairs of state. Some of the issues raised by Brand regarding Kerr's life and career will be areas that this study will

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 241.

explore in relation to the latter's connection to the Irish question; for example, the personal influence he exerted while he was at Downing Street and the possible role that religion may have played in his approach.

Grigg and Brand had been Kerr's friends and colleagues since his days in South Africa between 1905 and 1909. There is a great volume of literature on both Lord Milner's role in African politics and the group of young men that surrounded him. The young disciples of Milner were known affectionately as 'Milner's Kindergarten'. It was Kerr's membership of the 'Kindergarten' in the early stages of his career that first accorded him his historical importance. 'Milner's Kindergarten' refers to an informal club of colonial administrators and political activists in South Africa between 1902 and 1910. These were young men recruited by the high commissioner Viscount (Alfred) Milner and his successor, William Waldegave Palmer (Lord Selborne), to fill various posts in the administration of the Transvaal and Orange River colonies following the South African War of 1899-1902.<sup>47</sup> Although accounts of its membership vary, Kerr was understandably part of the circle, despite his arrival in South Africa just as Milner was leaving his post and returning to England. Although this study is chiefly concerned with Kerr's connection to Irish affairs it is still important that he is anchored within the history of Milner and the Kindergarten. Before Kerr encountered Lloyd George he was a chiefly a disciple of Milner and his imperial philosophy.

The literature on the Kindergarten is complex and it is the main area of historiography in which Kerr features. It consists mainly of biographies of Milner, many of which discuss the protégés surrounding him. The Milner Papers were

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<sup>47</sup> Alex May, 'Kerr, Philip Henry, Eleventh Marquess of Lothian (1882-1940)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, September 2004; online edition, January 2008.

published in two volumes edited by Cecil Headlam in the 1930s.<sup>48</sup> These make multiple references to Kerr but give little direct insight into his early political thinking. Numerous biographies then appeared in the 1950s. The first major volume on his life and work was *Alfred Lord Milner: The Man of no Illusions 1854-1925* by John Evelyn Wrench, published in 1958.<sup>49</sup> Wrench did not discuss Kerr in any detail, but other works on Milner by Vladimir Halpérin, A.M. Gollin and John Marlowe did.<sup>50</sup> Halpérin, in particular, devoted pages to Kerr, describing his career and how it resembled Milner's in the sense that it was varied but focused on the Empire. Although he noted Kerr's role within the Kindergarten, the Round Table, as Lloyd George's secretary, and his work on India in the 1930s, he did not refer to Kerr's work on Ireland. The biography of Milner by Edward Crankshaw did not make any reference to Kerr; rather it focused mainly on Milner's brand of imperialism.<sup>51</sup> In contrast Walter Nimock's *Milner's Young Men: the 'Kindergarten' in Edwardian Imperial Affairs* was the first detailed study of the Kindergarten in imperial affairs and its later incarnation as the Round Table.<sup>52</sup> Nimock's work covered the period from 1909 when the young men left South Africa, to the outbreak of war in 1914. His volume was the most important study of the group before the publication of John Kendle's research (discussed below). Kerr is discussed frequently in these works, anchoring his place in the history of imperialist thought.

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<sup>48</sup> Cecil Headlam, (ed.), *The Milner Papers Volume I and II* (London, 1931-33).

<sup>49</sup> John Evelyn Wrench, *Alfred Lord Milner, The Man of no Illusions 1854-1925* (London, 1958); Wrench was also the biographer of Kerr's friend and colleague, Geoffrey Dawson, editor of *The Times*: John Evelyn Wrench, *Geoffrey Dawson and Our Times* (London, 1955).

<sup>50</sup> Vladimir Halpérin, *Lord Milner and the Empire, The Evolution of British Imperialism* (London, 1952); A.M. Gollin, *Proconsul in Politics: a study of Lord Milner in Opposition and in Power* (London, 1964); John Marlowe, *Milner Apostle of Empire: a Life of Alfred George, the Right Honourable Viscount Milner of St James's and Cape Town, KG, GCB, GCMG, 1854-1925* (London, 1976).

<sup>51</sup> Edward Crankshaw, *The Forsaken Idea, A Study of Viscount Milner* (London, 1952).

<sup>52</sup> Walter Nimock, *Milner's Young Men: the Kindergarten in Edwardian Imperial Affairs* (London, 1970).



Milner and the Kindergarten continue to be a fruitful area of historical enquiry. In 2002 Hugh and Mirabel Cecil produced *Imperial Marriage, An Edwardian War and Peace* recounting the story of Milner's wife, Violet Maxse, her first husband Lord Edward Cecil and her relationship with Milner.<sup>53</sup> A more recent volume by J. Lee Thompson, published in 2007, attempted to shed new light on Milner's ideas and the role of the Kindergarten, and of female imperialists, in cultivating them.<sup>54</sup> The author makes frequent references to Kerr. He claims that the latter declined to sign the Ulster Covenant during the Ulster crisis of 1912-14. This is slightly misleading as Kerr was removed from Round Table activities during these years as a result of illness. Chapter 3 will discuss this in further detail. It is important however that Thompson does at least link Kerr and his colleagues to the Irish question.

In the mid 1970s John Kendle's *The Round Table Movement and Imperial Union* explored the development of the movement from its roots in the Kindergarten to its development as an active organisation.<sup>55</sup> Kendle explains that while the Round Table members advocated imperial union they also believed in the notion of 'Home Rule all Round'; that is, the federation of the United Kingdom into distinct political units. This was by no means a new concept in British politics at that time; the height of the Home Rule agitation had come during the 1880s. Yet the Round Table members were perhaps the most significant champions of federalism in terms of an organisation designed to argue the federalist case. Kendle acknowledges that the major goals of the movement were never fully realised and were 'probably hopeless from the beginning'.<sup>56</sup> They underestimated the forces with which they were dealing and were hindered by their basic assumption that British rule was superior to any other. As a

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<sup>53</sup> Hugh and Mirabel Cecil, *Imperial Marriage : An Edwardian War and Peace* (London, 2002).

<sup>54</sup> J. Lee Thompson, *A Wider Patriotism: Alfred Milner and the British Empire* (London, 2007).

<sup>55</sup> John Kendle, *The Round Table Movement and Imperial Union* (Toronto, 1975).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 301.



result the movement could not fully connect with the ideals of the Irish Nationalists or the people of the dominions. Furthermore the Round Table members were businessmen, lawyers, academics, journalists and politicians; hardly a true representation of the population as a whole. Nevertheless, the group was an organised political machine with a specific goal to unify the Empire. Kerr's involvement in the organisation would undoubtedly have a direct influence on his involvement in Irish affairs as private secretary to Lloyd George.

Kendle's later work, *Ireland and the Federal Solution*, charts the development of federalism as a potential solution to the Irish problem from the earliest attempts in the nineteenth century, through the Home Rule movement, to the federal devolution that came into being in 1921 with the creation of Northern Ireland.<sup>57</sup> As in his previous work on the *Round Table*, Kendle describes the role of its members and its significance as an organisation but only in relation to Ireland in this case. He concludes that although federalism meant different things to different people, for the Unionists it was a means of ensuring that the British Empire was maintained at any cost. It was irrelevant what the feelings of the Irish were, and what they really wanted for their future. The author states that Kerr's attendance at the 'Speaker's Conference on Devolution' was especially interesting because he was named as one of the secretaries of the Cabinet Committee on Ireland.<sup>58</sup> This however is not sufficient to determine how important Kerr was to this issue. Kendle also alludes to Kerr's support for partition of the six Ulster counties and his admission that the 1920 Ireland Bill had defects, although he does not make it clear what the latter thought that these defects were.<sup>59</sup> His volume places Kerr within the context of proposed federal solutions to

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<sup>57</sup> John Kendle, *Ireland and the Federal Solution, The Debate over the United Kingdom Constitution, 1870-1921* (Kingston, 1989).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230-1.

the Irish problem. Yet his work has meant that subsequent historians have tended to define Kerr's connection with Ireland in relation to his membership of the Round Table. This is too simple an interpretation given the extent of his involvement.

The member of the Kindergarten to whom Kerr was closest was Lionel Curtis. The two men would remain life-long friends and establish the Round Table together. It was Curtis who devised the idea of a monthly journal and persuaded Kerr to become its editor. Deborah Lavin has written the only extensive biography of Curtis to date, detailing his life and vision of a world federation.<sup>60</sup> Curtis served as a secretary to the British delegation at the Anglo-Irish negotiations of 1921 and would remain as an advisor on Irish affairs at the Colonial Office until 1924. Although Kerr had left his position as Lloyd George's secretary by mid-1921, Curtis was a clear link between Kerr and the Anglo-Irish negotiations. Their closeness means that there is not a great volume of correspondence between them during this time: they would have seen each other on almost a daily basis. Nevertheless, a selection of their correspondence was published in 1992, edited by Andrea Bosco, as an introduction to the *Annals of the Lothian Foundation*.<sup>61</sup> The correspondence between them in both the Lothian and Lionel Curtis Papers is concerned primarily with Round Table affairs. But there is some interesting material that relates to Ireland in 1910, when the Kindergarten had returned from South Africa and was developing its scheme for United Kingdom federation. This will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 3.

One of Kerr's contemporaries who is vital to understanding his personality is another close acquaintance, Nancy, Viscountess Astor. Kerr's friendship with Astor reveals a great deal about him. Kerr enjoyed a close friendship with both Nancy and her husband, Waldorf Astor, who also worked in Lloyd George's wartime secretariat.

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<sup>60</sup> Deborah Lavin, *From Empire to International Commonwealth: a Biography of Lionel Curtis* (Oxford, 1995).

<sup>61</sup> Andrea Bosco (ed.) in Lothian Foundation, *Annals of the Lothian Foundation* (London, 1992).

He was particularly close to Nancy, however, and she would remain a life-long friend and confidante. It was she who introduced Kerr to Christian Science while he was recuperating from appendicitis in 1914. The Astors entertained the young men of the 'Round Table' during weekend gatherings at their grand home, Cliveden. Prominent politicians, writers and newspaper men of the day would also be invited and it was here that Kerr would be exposed to a wide range of contacts. It was also at Cliveden that the 'Round Table' members would attempt to influence politicians with their federal schemes. Nancy was an important part of Kerr's life and in his letters to her he talked freely of politics, spirituality and his heartbreak over a broken engagement.<sup>62</sup> Some references to Ireland appear in the letters, mostly between 1914 and 1916. As Kerr would see a good deal of the Astors during his years at Downing Street, and while working on the Government of Ireland Bill, there is less correspondence during that time. The letters that do contain relevant Irish references will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Nancy Witcher Langhorne was an American from Virginia who married the millionaire William Waldorf Astor. She would become the first female Member of Parliament to take her seat and therefore she has received considerable attention from historians.<sup>63</sup> There are two classic biographies of her, John Grigg's *Nancy Astor* and Christopher Sykes' *Nancy, the Life of Lady Astor*.<sup>64</sup> Both provide a thorough account of her life and career and refer to her friendship with Kerr in some detail. Notoriety attached itself to those in her circle who regularly gathered at Cliveden, especially in the 1930s. These were given the title 'The Cliveden Set' by the press. This was

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<sup>62</sup> Philip Kerr to Nancy Astor 3 December 1912, Nancy Astor Papers, MS16/1/445. The Lady in question was Lady Beatrice Cecil, daughter of the Fourth Marquess of Salisbury.

<sup>63</sup> The first to be elected was Constance Georgine, Countess Markievicz, as a Sinn Féin candidate for Dublin's St. Patrick's division in 1918.

<sup>64</sup> John Grigg, *Nancy Astor* (London, 1980); Christopher Sykes, *Nancy, The Life of Lady Astor* (London, 1972).

until his appointment as the British Ambassador to Washington in 1939. A collection of his American speeches were published after his death in 1941.<sup>69</sup> Few of these works make significant reference to Ireland. Indeed Kerr was more concerned with the development of an international commonwealth in his later career, including Ireland, and with forging a stronger bond between the United Kingdom and the United States. He did however draw on his prior experience in Irish affairs in the years after 1921. These areas will be explored in a later chapter of this thesis.

The Irish question remains widely debated and recent work on Kerr's career indicates his importance in this issue. There is still a need to explore his work on the Irish question in detail. The thesis will consider this in a chronological and thematic way. In doing so extensive use has been made of the Lothian Papers and the papers of Kerr's contemporaries, in particular those of David Lloyd George. Both collections contain a wealth of material that link Kerr closely to the Irish question during the 1917-21 period and have yet to be fully utilised. The Lothian Papers, in particular, contain three volumes of Irish related material along with separate documents relating to the Government of Ireland Bill of 1920. In addition the thesis draws on materials not previously used and certainly not in an Irish context. For example, Manuscripts belonging to the present Marquess of Lothian, kept at Monteviot House in Jedburgh, bring a new perspective to Kerr's approach to the Irish problem. In particular they provide an insight into Kerr's upbringing and his Catholicism.

This is not a political biography; it is a study of Philip Kerr and Ireland. The chosen time frame is 1910-1921, with particular emphasis on the revolutionary period. There is also much to say pre 1910 and post 1921 that provides valuable context. The focus however remains 1910-21. Beginning with an overview of Kerr's family

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<sup>69</sup> Royal Institute of International Affairs, *The American speeches of Lord Lothian: July 1939 to December 1940* (London, 1941).

background, this study will consider his early connections to Ireland and the religious influences that may have had a bearing on his later approach to the Irish question. There will then be some discussion of Kerr's early career in South Africa before Chapter 3 considers his work as part of the Round Table Movement. Chapter 4 assesses Kerr's work on Ireland as part of Lloyd George's wartime secretariat, while Chapter 5 deals more specifically with his work on the Government of Ireland Bill and his attitude towards the Anglo-Irish War between 1919 and 1921. Chapters 6 and 7 are thematic, relating the American and religious aspects of Kerr's work on Ireland respectively. Finally some consideration will be given to Kerr's short spell as editor of the *Daily Chronicle* while the Epilogue considers any connections that Kerr may have had with Ireland beyond 1921.

## Chapter 2

### The Kerrs, Catholicism and Ireland

Having surveyed the existing work that relates to this study this chapter will consider Philip Kerr's personal background in greater depth. In particular it aims to establish Kerr's connections to Ireland during his formative years and early career. In doing so both his family background and religious beliefs will be considered, along with his education, and years working for the British administration in South Africa. Kerr's aristocratic lineage and his family's Catholicism have already been briefly discussed in the literature review. However these factors will be considered in greater detail here. The aim is to develop a broader understanding of how early influences may have affected Kerr's attitude to Ireland in later years when he worked for Lloyd George. The Kerrs, and the Howards on Kerr's mother's side, were important political families and both had connections to Irish politics. Philip Kerr spent some of his formative years in Ireland while his father, Lord Ralph Drury Kerr, was a major-general in command of the British military base at the Curragh in Ireland between 1891 and 1896. This would have left Philip with memories and impressions of Ireland that he would carry into adulthood. Equally, Kerr's experiences at school, university and his early career in South Africa would have influenced his attitude towards Irish affairs. These will be considered in order to gain a more thorough picture of Kerr and his approach to the Irish question.

The Kerrs had been an important family in the Scottish borders since their arrival there circa 1330. In his study of Sir Robert Kerr, Earl of Ancram (1578-1654), David Laing wrote:

the ancient and noble Family of KERR were of Anglo-Norman lineage, and descended of two brothers who settled in Scotland in the thirteenth century. Their descendants branched off into two separate races of Border chieftains, each asserting their own title as chief of the name – the Kerrs of Ferniehirst, now represented by the Marquess of Lothian, and the Kerrs of Cessford by the Duke of Roxburghe.<sup>1</sup>

Although they had never been at the forefront of political affairs, the Kerrs had maintained a constant presence in British politics throughout the centuries and had been involved in some of the most famous events in Scottish and British history. Members of the family fought at the Battle of Flodden Field in 1513 and in Jedburgh it is locally said that Sir Thomas Kerr of Ferniehirst was a loyal supporter of Mary, Queen of Scots in the 1560s. His son, Robert Kerr, later became a favourite of King James VI and I. and, as such, he was known to hold considerable political influence.<sup>2</sup> The Kerrs later supported the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the Union of the parliaments of Scotland and England in 1707. At the time of the Jacobite risings they supported the government. Lord William Kerr, later the Fourth Marquess of Lothian, served under the Duke of Cumberland at the Battle of Culloden, while his younger brother, Lord Robert Kerr, was the person of highest rank to be killed on the government side. The Marquessate was created in 1701 for Robert Kerr, the Fourth Earl and subsequently the First Marquess of Lothian, and the seat of the Kerrs is Ferniehirst Castle, in the border town of Jedburgh, although the principal seat is sometimes considered to be Monteviot House where the family reside today. They

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<sup>1</sup> David Laing, *Correspondence of Sir Robert Kerr, First Earl of Ancram and his son William, Third Earl of Lothian, Vol. I. 1616 – 1649* (Edinburgh, 1875). p. V.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Kerr anglicised his name from the Scottish 'Kerr' to 'Carr' when he went to court in England.

remain influential and have maintained an astonishing capacity for hard work. It will become apparent that Philip Kerr shared these family traits.

In view of their colourful past it is surprising that no single volume of work on the family has been produced. References to the Kerrs can however be found in numerous works. In particular, George MacDonald Fraser's *The Steel Bonnets* describes the family's importance in the history of the Anglo-Scottish border country.<sup>3</sup> Fraser makes multiple references to their active presence in the borders, suggesting that 'The Kerrs were, with the possible exception of the Scotts, the leading tribe of the Scottish Middle March, which they frequently ruled as Wardens', adding that despite this, 'no family was more active in reiving'.<sup>4</sup> The correspondence between Sir Robert Kerr (Carr), First Earl of Ancram, and his son William, Third Earl of Lothian, published in 1875, provides an insight into these two fascinating figures of the seventeenth century.<sup>5</sup> Both were politically active during the English Civil War period. Having been the favourite of James VI and I, Robert Kerr remained loyal to James' son King Charles I, while his own son, William Kerr, opposed the King during the civil wars. The latter had signed the National Covenant in 1638, and through him we see the first connection to the Kerrs and the Irish question. When rebellion broke out in Ireland in October 1641, as a result of Catholic fears of suppression by Scottish Covenanters and leading English Puritans, William Kerr commanded one of the regiments sent to repress the rebellion. His regiment stayed there until February 1644.<sup>6</sup> This correspondence anchors them within wider British history. In Philip's own time, his uncle Schomberg Henry Kerr, the Ninth Marquess of Lothian, led a

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<sup>3</sup> George MacDonald Fraser, *The Steel Bonnets, The Story of the Anglo-Scottish Border Reivers* (London, 1971).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>5</sup> David Laing, *Correspondence of Sir Robert Kerr, First Earl of Ancram and his son William, Third Earl of Lothian, Vol. I. 1616 – 1649* (Edinburgh, 1875).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. lxiv-lxv.



distinguished diplomatic career and, as a result, has been the subject of historical study. He was the Secretary for Scotland from 1886-1892, and as such was involved in attempts to generate economic development in the Highlands. His proposals drew parallels with similar schemes used in Ireland, such as railway building and the improvement of agriculture.<sup>7</sup> Robert Kerr (c.1578-1654), William Kerr (c.1605-1675), Schomberg Kerr (1833-1900) and Philip Kerr (1882-1940), remain the most well known members of the family historically.

Philip's childhood appears to have been a very happy one and he was adored by his parents. His mother, Lady Anne Kerr, kept a journal of her children, describing their traits and noting the development of their characters.<sup>8</sup> She began the journal in September 1887 while Ralph Kerr was stationed in York and Philip five years old. Although it appears to end in October 1887 it provides a very personal insight into Philip Kerr's family life, his nature as a child and his relationship with his parents.<sup>9</sup> Philip was described as 'winsome', and very fair with large blue eyes that had an 'absent dreamy look in them'.<sup>10</sup> He was a happy child, yet with a melancholy expression, and was said to be fond of quiet amusements unless he was worked up to a noisy game. His parents feared he would be 'rather soft and muffish' as he had a tendency to be clingy, but were relieved to see him becoming 'more manly'.<sup>11</sup> Lady Anne Kerr was not afraid to point out the flaws in her children's characters. She noted that her daughter, Cecil, who was four, had a character that would be difficult to train as her 'little failings' were so prominent. She did not have such concerns about

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<sup>7</sup> Ewen A. Cameron, *Land for the People? The British Government and the Scottish Highlands, c. 1880-1925* (East Linton, 1996) p. 74.

<sup>8</sup> Lady Anne Kerr retained her own name and was not referred to as 'Lady Ralph Kerr' because she was the daughter of a duke, Henry Granville Fitzalan-Howard, the fourteenth Duke of Norfolk. In marrying Lord Ralph Kerr, the son of a Marquess, she married beneath her own social status.

<sup>9</sup> The existing pages may be a fragment of a larger document that is missing. Source forms part of a private collection belonging to the 13<sup>th</sup> Marquess of Lothian, kept at Monteviot House, near Jedburgh.

<sup>10</sup> Lady Anne Kerr, Sept 1887, Private Collection, Monteviot House, Brown Envelope labelled 'Early Letters Before Schooldays, Early Letters Pre-School'.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

Philip. His father had whipped him on one occasion for telling a lie but his mother was confident the lesson had been learnt. Philip's maternal Grandmother, Minna, Duchess of Norfolk, used to say of him 'who could help falling victim to Ippy Kerr', a name Philip used for himself.<sup>12</sup> Kerr was an attractive figure both as a child and as an adult. His mother considered him special, commenting that 'sometimes I think God has given us that child just as he is because he took the first to himself'.<sup>13</sup> The Kerrs' baby daughter, Mary Cecil, had died at only two weeks old while Ralph Kerr was stationed in India in 1880. The sergeants of the Tenth Hussars had carried her coffin in a touching ceremony described by Lady Anne in her journal. When Philip was born exactly two years later in 1882 he was treasured by his bereaved parents.

The family was a close one and the Kerrs often took part in leisure activities together, such as fishing and cycling. Philip Kerr's biographers have stated that he was closer to his mother, yet the private papers reveal that he spent a great deal of time with his father and they would often go walking together. Kerr's mother observed that he and his father had 'a perfect understanding together.'<sup>14</sup> When Ralph Kerr officially retired in 1898 both he and Philip would regularly cycle from the family home of Woodburn, near Dalkeith, into Edinburgh, or to Monteviot, near Jedburgh, to visit Lord Ralph Kerr's brother and Philip's uncle, Schomberg Kerr. Lady Anne watched her children's spiritual development carefully. At five years old she described Philip as 'not very pious' but had 'a great deal of faith and is sure that "dear Mary" will give him a fine day or anything he wants for his amusement'.<sup>15</sup> She wrote that:

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Lady Anne Kerr, Sept 1887, Private Collection, Monteviot House, Brown Envelope labelled 'Early Letters Before Schooldays, Early Letters Pre-School'.

<sup>14</sup> Lady Anne Kerr, 21 Oct 1887, Private Collection, Monteviot House, Brown Envelope labelled 'Early Letters Before Schooldays, Early Letters Pre-School'.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

all the children have a great idea of praying for the conversion of their friends, Baby [Lady Margaret Kerr, only three years old at the time] carries it further and prays nearly every day for the conversion of the 'Salvation Army'. They have a meeting house near us in York and she hears their band and immediately says 'there are those silly people, please God make them Catholics'.<sup>16</sup>

Lady Anne went on to record Cecil asking if 'Our Lord was in the Protestant churches as much as he was in the houses of every where [sic.] else'.<sup>17</sup> The children were acutely aware of their Catholicism from a very young age and were developing a sense of superiority over other denominations. Philip was reported to have said his catechism very well and had an understanding of the 'Blessed Sacrament'. His mother had been surprised to find how well he had understood the Consecration after serving Mass with his father.

Religion will be an important theme running throughout this thesis in relation to Kerr's attitude to the Irish question and his own religious struggles. The Kerrs became Protestants at the time of the Reformation, yet today they are among the most prominent Catholic aristocratic families of Great Britain. In his introduction to *The Catholic Families*, Mark Bence-Jones states that 'The Catholic families, most of them of ancient and illustrious lineage, form a distinctive group in the British aristocracy through having suffered for their faith during the centuries following the

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<sup>16</sup> Lady Anne Kerr, Sept 1887, Private Collection, Monteviot House, Brown Envelope labelled 'Early Letters Before Schooldays, Early Letters Pre-School'.

<sup>17</sup> Lady Anne Kerr, 23 Oct 1887, Private Collection, Monteviot House, Brown Envelope labelled 'Early Letters Before Schooldays, Early Letters Pre-School'.

Reformation'.<sup>18</sup> Due to their religious affiliations there was a tendency to intermarry and therefore, according to Bence-Jones, they became like one extended family. He explains that the nineteenth century conversions to Catholicism were largely associated with the 'Oxford Movement', but there were a variety of other causes.<sup>19</sup> The Kerr's were part of this wave of conversions. Philip's Grandmother, Lady Cecil Chetwynd Kerr, was married to John William Robert Kerr, the Seventh Marquess of Lothian. She converted to the Catholic faith in 1851, ten years after her husband's early death. Her conversion has been described in numerous works, including *The Oxford Movement in Scotland* and the memoir edited by her granddaughter and namesake, Lady Anne Cecil Kerr, entitled *Cecil, Marchioness of Lothian: a Memoir*.<sup>20</sup>

Her story draws a fascinating parallel with that of her grandson Philip as they both went to live in Ireland as children where their fathers held posts for a number of years. Both were only nine years old when they arrived in Ireland; Lady Cecil was fifteen when she left in 1821 and Philip fourteen when his father retired and returned to Scotland in 1896. Philip's great-grandfather, Charles Chetwynd Talbot, Second Lord Talbot of Hensol, had been appointed Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in 1817 while Sir Robert Peel was Irish Secretary. His wife, Frances Thomasine, was from Irish stock, being the first daughter of Charles Lambert of Beau Parc in County Meath. Indeed, Talbot's Irish family connections had almost deprived him of the position as it raised serious objections from Peel and Lord Whitworth in putting him at the head of the country's affairs.<sup>21</sup> Despite this, Talbot became popular in Dublin and developed a close relationship with Peel. The former took a special interest in Ireland's

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<sup>18</sup> Mark Bence-Jones, *The Catholic Families* (London, 1992) p. 17.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>20</sup> William Perry, *The Oxford Movement in Scotland* (London, 1933); Lady Anne Cecil Kerr, *Cecil, Marchioness of Lothian: a Memoir / edited by her Granddaughter* (London, 1922).

<sup>21</sup> Norman Gash, *Mr. Secretary Peel, The Life of Sir Robert Peel to 1830* (London, 1961) p. 229.

agriculture during his time in office, and was created a knight of the Order of St. Patrick when George IV visited Ireland in 1821. Although he opposed the movement for Catholic emancipation, Daniel O'Connell acknowledged his impartiality.<sup>22</sup> Yet discontent in Ireland increased during Talbot's time in office and he was replaced by Lord Wellesley in 1821.

Talbot's daughter, Cecil, as previously mentioned, was nine years old when he moved his family to Dublin. Her biography suggests that the death of her mother in 1819 'seems to have awakened her young soul, and to have made her thoughtful beyond her years'.<sup>23</sup> Further to this it is suggested that 'No doubt, too, her residence in a Catholic country must have made some impression on an intelligent girl of her age, although the religion of the people can hardly have been able to show itself in its true light to the child of the English Viceroy.'<sup>24</sup> There is a clear link made between her time spent in Ireland as a child and her conversion to Catholicism many years later. Ironically, her grandson Philip would spend years there as a child when already a member of the Catholic faith, and then in later years convert to Christian Science. Cecil Talbot became Lady Lothian on her marriage to John William Robert Kerr, the Seventh Marquess in 1831. She became interested in the Tractarian Movement through her brother, John Talbot, and her brother-in-law, Lord Henry Kerr, who were both studying at Oxford. Indeed, she has been credited with helping to publicise the Oxford movement in Scotland. William Perry claimed that 'The romance of religion went to her head' since she attracted attention by travelling long distances on foot to

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<sup>22</sup> E. I. Carlyle, 'Talbot, Charles Chetwynd-, second Earl Talbot of Hensol (1777-1849)', rev. H. C. G. Matthew, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Lady Anne Cecil Kerr, *Cecil, Marchioness of Lothian: A Memoir / edited by her Granddaughter* (Edinburgh, 1922). p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

attend Mass.<sup>25</sup> When Henry Edward Manning defected to Rome in 1850, she followed him saying 'Manning's course shall decide mine'.<sup>26</sup> She converted officially to Catholicism in 1851.

Following her conversion Lady Lothian was treated with suspicion by her husband's family. He had died at an early age in 1841 and the guardians of his will feared that she would attempt to convert her younger sons to Catholicism, as her daughters had already followed their mother into the faith. These fears were confirmed when Lady Lothian escaped by night from Newbattle to Edinburgh where Bishop Gillis received her sons, Lord Ralph and Lord John Kerr, into the Catholic Church. Their eldest brother, William Schomberg Robert Kerr, the Eighth Marquess of Lothian, was away at Oxford at the time and remained a staunch Episcopalian. On his early death in 1870 he was succeeded by his brother Schomberg Henry Kerr, who had also remained an Episcopalian. Lord Walter Talbot Kerr, the next brother in line, had been away at sea at the time of his younger brothers' conversion but followed their lead, becoming a Catholic in 1856. There tends to be a misapprehension that the Lothian title has been a Catholic one for generations. This is not the case.

Schomberg Kerr's son, Robert, became the Tenth Marquess in 1900 and like his father was not a Catholic. On inheriting the title from his cousin in 1930, Philip became the Eleventh Marquess and the first to have been born a Catholic. To complicate matters further he was a practising Christian Scientist by this time, having officially left the Catholic faith in 1923 after years of religious doubt. It was not until the succession of his cousin, Peter Francis Walter Kerr, in 1940 that the title became a Catholic one. The Twelfth Marquess died in 2004 and was succeeded by his son, the

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<sup>25</sup> William Perry, *The Oxford Movement in Scotland* (London, 1933) p. 41-42.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* p. 44.

former Conservative Minister for Northern Ireland, Michael Andrew Foster Jude Kerr (Michael Ancram).

Philip Kerr's father, Lord Ralph Kerr, never wavered from his faith following his conversion in 1851. He had been the closest of his brothers to their mother and joined her in Rome shortly before her death in 1877. His conversion is described in his own words in his daughter's work on her grandmother, *Cecil: Marchioness of Lothian*.<sup>27</sup> Lord Ralph ensured Philip's strict Catholic upbringing when he married into the most powerful Catholic family in Great Britain. Philip's mother, Lady Anne Fitzalan-Howard, was the daughter of the Fourteenth Duke of Norfolk. The Fitzalan-Howards held the premier dukedom in the English peerage, and as hereditary earl marshals, the Dukes of Norfolk supervised the coronation of each monarch.<sup>28</sup> Indeed they are the only surviving dukedom of medieval creation. John Martin Robinson has written the main history of the family.<sup>29</sup> In his preface he summarises what has made the family so intriguing:

they were at the centre of things and yet excluded because of their adherence to Catholicism, a religious denomination which was illegal in England for three hundred years and of which they were the leading members. For centuries it has been their peculiar position to have been, on the one hand, premier English peers, great officers of state and the possessors of incredible riches, and on the other, debarred from most of the consequences and rewards of this pre-eminence by loyalty to a proscribed religion.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Lady Anne Cecil Kerr, *Cecil, Marchioness of Lothian: a Memoir / edited by her Granddaughter*, pp. 121-134.

<sup>28</sup> David P. Billington, *Lothian, Philip Kerr and the Quest for World Order* (Westport, 2006) p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> John Martin Robinson, *The Dukes of Norfolk* (Chichester, 1995).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. vi.



Philip's parents therefore gave him an interesting mix of both Scottish and English aristocratic ancestry and an allegiance to the Catholic faith. What is interesting for the purposes of this study is the connection of both families to Irish politics.

Philip's Uncle, Henry Fitzalan-Howard the Fifteenth Duke of Norfolk, held staunch views on Ireland. He had strongly opposed Gladstone's Home Rule policy of the 1880s and aligned with the Conservatives. Robinson points out that although a Catholic, the Duke was a wholehearted Unionist and was against any proposals which he saw as likely to dismember the United Kingdom. Whilst he regretted that there had been 'evil in the past in the government of Ireland' he did not believe the answer was in self-government.<sup>31</sup> According to Robinson, the Duke was in high demand on Unionist platforms as he demonstrated that the Irish question was not simply Protestant, against Catholic.<sup>32</sup> This also counteracts the argument made by Gary Peatling that Catholics were traditionally unsympathetic to imperial goals, and hence families such as Philip Kerr's were troubled by this association.<sup>33</sup> Robinson goes so far as to state that it is one of the tragedies of modern British history that the Duke was not appointed Viceroy of Ireland under Salisbury and Balfour from 1895 to 1905. It was not possible at that time however for a Catholic to hold the position. He goes on to argue that the Duke, along with George Wyndham as Chief Secretary, would have formed a powerful combination in favour of reconciliation and might have avoided the disaster of partition.<sup>34</sup> This is not convincing as Wyndham's appointment of a Catholic Under-Secretary in a sense brought about his downfall (this will be discussed below). The Duke's younger brother and Kerr's uncle, Edmund Talbot, became the first Catholic Viceroy of Ireland in spring 1921. It seems that the

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 228-229.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>33</sup> G.K. Peatling, *British Opinion and Irish Self-Government, 1865-1925* (Dublin, 2001) p. 116.

<sup>34</sup> John Martin Robinson, *The Dukes of Norfolk*, p. 229.



government decided to make a conciliatory gesture towards the Irish and passed a special Act of Parliament so that he could be appointed. Cardinal Logue reportedly observed at the time that 'we would as soon have a Catholic hangman'.<sup>35</sup> In order to become Viceroy, Talbot was elevated to the peerage and took the title Viscount Fitzalan of Derwent.

In 1893 the Duke of Norfolk led the protest of the 'British Catholic Unionists' against Home Rule. His brother in law and Philip's father, Lord Ralph Kerr, was one of the signatories of the statement printed in the newspapers. The group's concern was primarily a religious one. They rejected the claim that Home Rule would promote the welfare of the Catholic Church in Ireland. Instead, the statement condemned practices used by supporters of Home Rule such as boycotting and the 'Plan of Campaign', practices that had also been condemned by the Holy See. The Catholic Unionists argued that individuals carrying out such acts would become political leaders in a Home Rule government and therefore must be opposed. Ultimately they disapproved of any attempts to break up the United Kingdom. The printed statement provides a direct indication of Philip Kerr's family's stance on Ireland and Home Rule.<sup>36</sup> As both English and Scottish Catholic Unionists, his father and uncle publicly opposed Gladstone's second Home Rule Bill. This adds an intriguing dimension to Philip's later role as he would assist in implementing Home Rule in Ireland.

As a younger son of the Seventh Marquess, Lord Ralph Kerr would not have been expected to inherit the Lothian title. He led a distinguished military career, joining the Tenth Hussars in 1857 and commanding the regiment in the second Afghan War of 1879. There has been no biography of Ralph Kerr and there is no significant

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<sup>35</sup> Frank Owen, *Tempestuous Journey* (London, 1954) p. 574.

<sup>36</sup> 'British Roman Catholics and Home Rule' in *The Times* Tuesday 1 June 1893, p. 7, col. B.

archive material relating to him. However one is able to gain some insight into his life and character from his daughter's *Cecil, Marchioness of Lothian*. Contemporary newspaper accounts also add to our knowledge of him. In 1891 he was appointed major-general in command of the British military base at the Curragh in Ireland. This is of considerable significance to this study as Philip Kerr would have had childhood memories from this period. Admittedly, Philip would not have spent a great deal of time in Ireland as the family would have been there only a year before he was sent away to school in England in 1892. School holidays were often spent at the home of his relatives, the Fitzalan-Howards, at Arundel in West Sussex. Nonetheless this is a firm connection to Ireland during his formative years. His father was there in a position of policing the British Empire and Philip would have been exposed to political and religious life in Ireland. He was old enough to have had an awareness of events around him and to form strong impressions.

The British army's chief role in Ireland was to maintain law and order. During the 1880s the main threat to peace had been from agrarian agitation and sectarian disturbances. Following the Plan of Campaign, by the 1890s these problems had largely subsided due to policies of coercion and conciliation by the Irish Chief-Secretary, Arthur Balfour.<sup>37</sup> Yet these years were turbulent ones in a political sense. The split within the Irish Parliamentary Party following the Parnell divorce scandal (the Parnell Split), and the death of its leader Charles Stewart Parnell in 1891, meant that it would never regain its former strength. Gladstone's second Home Rule Bill for Ireland was introduced in 1893 and eventually rejected by the House of Lords. As previously discussed, Ralph Kerr became involved in Irish political affairs through his opposition to this Home Rule Bill. He was not actively involved in politics however.

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<sup>37</sup> Edward M. Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army 1868-1902* (Manchester, 1992) p. 220-221.

As major-general in command of the Curragh district his role was primarily a military one.

Contemporary newspaper reports suggest that his promotion to major-general shortly before his posting to Ireland sparked some controversy. *The Belfast News-Letter* wrote:

To say that the recent promotion of Lord Ralph Kerr to the rank of major-general by selection has occasioned dissatisfaction in the army is very inadequately to express the widespread feeling of disgust with which several of the senior colonels over whose heads Lord Ralph Kerr has been advanced.<sup>38</sup>

The report went further in describing his promotion as 'monstrous' and as 'favouritism'.<sup>39</sup> The paper did not speculate on the possible reasons for this supposed preferential treatment. Yet his religion may have been the reason for this promotion and post. Kerr was openly Catholic and actively involved with the local clergy and parish life wherever he happened to be. It is possible that he was thus a suitable choice to command the Curragh and win the respect of the local Catholic population. Furthermore, the Adjutant-General of the army, Viscount Wolseley, had expressed concerns to the Duke of Cambridge regarding the reliability of Irish troops, believing them to be easily led and prone to drink.<sup>40</sup> Prince George, the Second Duke of Cambridge and Queen Victoria's cousin was commander of the forces and also a Catholic. It is possible that he may have seen Ralph Kerr as an obvious candidate for the role. Shortly after Kerr took up his post, Cambridge visited the Curragh and in a speech praised the appearance and training of the troops under the former's charge.

<sup>38</sup> 'Pickings from Piccadilly', *The Belfast News-Letter*, Friday, 7 Feb 1890, p. 7, column 6.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Edward M. Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army 1868-1902*, p. 222-223.

This may have been nothing out of the ordinary but it would have gone some way towards counteracting the bad publicity surrounding Kerr's appointment.

Ralph Kerr did become actively involved in Catholic life both at the Curragh and in the Kildare district. He played an integral role in the opening of a Catholic Soldiers' Institute at the Curragh in 1896, contributing fifty pounds to the fund and becoming a patron of the institute. A contribution of ten pounds was also made by James Lynch, Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, and Father Joseph Delany, chaplain to the forces, had visited parishes in the diocese collecting for the building expenses.<sup>41</sup> This was Ralph Kerr's most significant legacy from his time at the Curragh. His wife, Lady Anne Kerr, had laid the building's foundation stone in a ceremony that was widely reported in the press. Kerr's participation in the religious life of the diocese was not however restricted to the Curragh Camp. In 1894 a fair was held under the patronage of Lord Ralph and Lady Anne Kerr to celebrate the opening of the new Carmelite Church of the White Abbey, Kildare.<sup>42</sup> The Kerrs were thus a visible presence in the Catholic community of Ireland during the five years that they spent there, and given their social position, they would have known and come into contact with prominent Irish Catholic figures.

Ralph Kerr was a member of the Committee of Cardinal Logue's Testimonial Fund in 1893. Other members of the Committee included the landowner and politician Sir Thomas Henry Grattan Esmonde, and judges Christopher Palles and Peter O'Brien. It is difficult to determine how Kerr was perceived by Irish Catholics such as these considering his own anti-Home Rule stance and high rank in the British

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<sup>41</sup> Con Costello, *Most Delightful Station: The British Army on the Curragh of Kildare, Ireland* (Cork, 1996) p. 126.

<sup>42</sup> *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* (Dublin, Ireland), Tuesday, 23 Oct 1894, p. 6, col. 4.

army. There is no mention of him in O'Brien's memoirs of the period.<sup>43</sup> Presumably he would have fitted in well as Esmonde had joined the anti-Parnellite side in the early 1880s. Logue had only just been made Cardinal in 1893 and was also active in promoting the anti-Parnellite cause. Yet his political views tended to be more concerned with guaranteeing the Catholic Church's interests in Ireland, than identifying with popular causes. David Miller has noted the description of Logue's politics as 'national rather than nationalist'.<sup>44</sup> Indeed he enjoyed 'waiting upon royalty, delighted in entertaining visiting British dignitaries with champagne and oysters'.<sup>45</sup> Although Archbishop William Walsh of Dublin had greater tact, it was Logue who received the Cardinal's hat in 1893. It is likely that Logue would have charmed the Kerrs as high ranking, aristocratic Catholics, and Ralph Kerr's membership of Logue's Testimonial Committee hints at his regard for the Cardinal.

There is potentially another interesting link between the Kerrs and the Irish hierarchy during their time in Ireland. The Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin from 1869-96 was James Lynch. Lynch had been moved to Kildare following his highly controversial period as coadjutor bishop of the Western District of Scotland between 1866 and 1868. There had been popular unrest between Scottish and Irish Catholics in the West of Scotland for some time prior to Lynch's appointment. Following the famine years of 1846-7 there was a large influx of Irish Catholics who settled in the Glasgow area.<sup>46</sup> Suspicion had grown between the rival Scottish and Irish communities. The Irish clergy and laity in the area felt discriminated against by the Scottish community and ecclesiastical authority, whilst the Scots clergy and laity

<sup>43</sup> Peter O'Brien, *Reminiscences of the Right Hon. Lord O'Brien (of Kilfenora), Lord Chief Justice of Ireland* (London, 1916).

<sup>44</sup> David W. Miller, *Church, State and Nation in Ireland 1898-1921* (Dublin, 1973) p. 12.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Davitt, 'James Lynch (1807-1896)' in *Colloque, Journal of the Irish Province of the Congregation of the Mission* No. 34 (Autumn, 1996) p. 294.

feared the Irish gathering too much power and influence. In particular they were afraid of the spread of Fenianism by the immigrant Irish.<sup>47</sup> Lynch's appointment did nothing to alleviate these problems and instead aggravated the grievances of both sides. As an Irish clergyman, his appointment was surprising to the Scots, and his ordination at the Irish College in Paris, rather than Glasgow, showed a lack of sensitivity to Scottish feelings. Lynch also managed to alienate the Irish community by choosing to live in a better off area of Glasgow, instead of the Bishop's quarters in the chapel house of St. Andrews. Added to this he became widely regarded as supporting the views of the *Glasgow Free Press* which supported the Fenian movement. As the situation worsened, a visitation by the Archbishop of Westminster, Henry Edward Manning, was deemed necessary in 1867. In his subsequent report he recommended that Lynch and Bishop John Gray be removed from the Western District. Lynch was thus appointed to the coadjutorship of Kildare and Leighlin on 5 April 1869 and in 1888 succeeded Bishop James Walshe as Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin. By the time of Kerr's arrival in 1891 Lynch's health was failing, although his mind remained sharp. As a Scottish Catholic, Ralph Kerr was no doubt fully aware of Lynch's years in Glasgow, and the controversy that surrounded them.

Philip Kerr would almost certainly have come into contact with such people during his childhood. A diary from 1898, when the family were back in Scotland, records visits by members of the clergy to the Kerrs' home of Woodburn, near Dalkeith. Philip noted visits in August by various priests on a daily basis, and by the Archbishop of Edinburgh, Angus MacDonald.<sup>48</sup> Lord Ralph Kerr had read the address in St. Mary's Cathedral at MacDonald's enthronement in 1892. Visits by the Irish clergy to their home at the Curragh would have also occurred. Unfortunately we

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid. p. 294-295.

<sup>48</sup> Philip Kerr's Diary 1898, Private collection, Monteviot House.



have no first-hand impressions of Philip Kerr's life at the Curragh or references to him meeting members of the Irish clergy. The letters he sent to his parents in Ireland from school were mainly full of news relating to his studies or sports that he played. On one occasion he wrote to his father asking if 'Jack' minded the big guns and what regiments were coming down for the summer.<sup>49</sup> This is one of Kerr's only references to life at the Curragh. No historian to date has attempted to explore his early connection to Ireland and his family's time there. Yet these years were significant because they would have helped to shape his perceptions of Ireland and the Irish. When he later drafted the Government of Ireland Bill he was not ignorant of Ireland and the Irish people.

One reference within the private papers at Monteviot House confirms a connection between Philip Kerr and a prominent individual with links to Irish affairs during this early period of his life. Wilfrid Ward was a notable Catholic and ecclesiastical biographer who produced works on Cardinals Nicholas Wiseman and John Henry Newman.<sup>50</sup> Ward was related to Philip Kerr by marriage, having married Kerr's cousin, Josephine Mary Hope, the daughter of James Hope-Scott and Victoria Howard, Philip's aunt. Philip's grandmother, Minna, duchess of Norfolk, had been Ward's godmother. Wilfrid Ward's father was the philosopher, William George Ward, a follower of Newman who had converted to Catholicism in 1845. Like Kerr, Ward had grown up in a strict Catholic atmosphere and had considered the priesthood as a career. Finding that the church was not his true vocation, he left the seminary of Ushaw College, County Durham, in 1881 and embarked on a career of journalism and writing. Ward was a friend of George Wyndham, the Chief Secretary for Ireland

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<sup>49</sup> Philip Kerr to Lord Ralph Kerr, 20 May 1894, Private Collection, Monteviot House, 'Letters from Philip Kerr to his family from school and Oxford'. It is not clear who 'Jack' was. He may have been the family's pet dog.

<sup>50</sup> Wilfrid Ward, *The Life and Times of Cardinal Wiseman* (London, 1897); *The Life of John Henry Cardinal Newman* (London, 1912).

1900-1905. They were both members of the 'Synthetic Society', formed in 1896 to discuss agnosticism and work towards a philosophy of religious belief based on modern lines. Ward's daughter, Maisie, wrote that her father's close friendship and admiration for Wyndham immensely influenced his own Irish outlook.<sup>51</sup>

Wyndham, a Tory romantic, was an imperialist with some sympathy for Irish nationalism.<sup>52</sup> He appointed a Liberal and Catholic Irishman, Sir Antony MacDonnell, as his Under-Secretary for Ireland, promising that MacDonnell was not a symbolic appointment but would have influence over the direction of policy.<sup>53</sup> Early in 1902 Wyndham had written to his father stating 'I shall pass a Land Bill, reconstruct the Agricultural Department and Congested Districts Board, stimulate Fishing and Horse-breeding; and revolutionise Education. Then I shall "nunc dimittis" and let some one else have a turn.'<sup>54</sup> Wyndham's Land Act of 1903 was the main achievement of his time as Irish Secretary. His term in Ireland ended in controversy, however, as he was accused of being involved in proposals for a limited form of administrative devolution in Ireland. His Under-Secretary, MacDonnell, was certainly involved, although Wyndham's own involvement has never been proved. It has been said that Wyndham had an almost Gladstonian sense of mission with regard to Ireland, and genuinely wanted to advance Irish interests.<sup>55</sup> But the devolution affair tarnished his Irish legacy. Maisie Ward wrote that Wyndham 'loved the Irish – and he believed in the Empire'.<sup>56</sup> She explained that both Wyndham and her father,

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<sup>51</sup> Maisie Ward, *The Wilfrid Wards and the Transition: II, Insurrection versus Resurrection* (London, 1937) p. 83.

<sup>52</sup> Alvin Jackson, 'Wyndham, George (1863–1913)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edition, Jan 2008.

<sup>53</sup> Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998* (Oxford, 1999) p. 150.

<sup>54</sup> J.W. Mackail and Guy Wyndham (eds.), *The Life and Letters of George Wyndham, Vol. II* (London, 1925) p. 436.

<sup>55</sup> Alvin Jackson, 'Wyndham, George (1863–1913)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, September 2004; online edition, Jan 2008.

<sup>56</sup> Maisie Ward, *The Wilfrid Wards and the Transition: II, Insurrection versus Resurrection* (London, 1937) p. 100.



as sincere Unionists, 'took it as simply axiomatic that England must continue to govern Ireland' and with this the absolute obligation that 'England must govern Ireland with regret for the past, wholly in the interests of Irishmen, and with the largest possible measure of generosity'.<sup>57</sup>

Philip Kerr knew Wilfrid Ward well. Ward's daughter, Maisie, and Philip's second cousin, wrote in her memoirs that her father and Philip enjoyed playing golf together and talked a great deal about politics and philosophy.<sup>58</sup> It is unfortunate that no correspondence exists between the two. There is a methodological problem here in that Kerr would see the people that he discussed political issues with on a regular basis and therefore he did not write about his thoughts on these issues. This was also the case with regards to his friendships with Lionel Curtis and Nancy Astor at a later stage. Some guesswork is therefore necessary at times in order to determine his views. It is reasonable to suggest that Kerr's earliest discussions of Irish affairs were with Ward, and there is some evidence to support this. One reference does exist. In a letter to his mother in 1902 Kerr wrote that 'Wilfrid Ward gives no news he is not going to Ireland until Jan 14<sup>th</sup> so you can hear no more of George Wyndham after that.'<sup>59</sup> The Kerrs would have remained interested in Irish political affairs on their return to Scotland in 1898 and no doubt would have followed Wyndham's efforts closely. His appointment of a Catholic would have particularly interested them, given their own social and religious position. Writing in 1902, Kerr's reference may have been in relation to Wyndham's Land Bill proposals or to 'inside information' from Ward. Kerr was from a Unionist background; he believed in the integrity of the

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid. p. 83.

<sup>58</sup> Maisie Ward, *Unfinished Business* (London, 1964) p. 44.

<sup>59</sup> Philip Kerr to Lady Anne Kerr, 8 Jan 1902, Private Collection, Monteviot House. Box 'Letters from Philip Kerr to his family from school and Oxford', Bundle labelled '1900-1904, France and Oxford'.

British Empire but would develop an interest in devolution. These early conversations with Ward very likely shaped his initial view of the Irish question.

In 1892 Kerr was sent to the Oratory School, Edgbaston, founded by Cardinal Newman in 1859. During his time there he considered joining the priesthood or the army but remained uncertain of his future career.<sup>60</sup> He entered New College, Oxford, in 1900 to study modern history. Robert Sangster Rait was Kerr's tutor there. Rait was an eminent historian and strong Unionist who published important works on the union between England and Scotland.<sup>61</sup> His influence may have helped to cement Kerr's early Unionist and imperial leanings. Both of Kerr's biographers, however, refer to his religious doubts as stemming from this time.<sup>62</sup> The Catholic bishops had banned their flock from studying at the university until 1896 when the ban was lifted due to pressure from the English Catholic community. The bishops had harboured concerns regarding the spirit of critical inquiry challenging the idea of a single intellectual authority. Kerr was an example of their fears becoming reality. Butler singles out the works of George Bernard Shaw as having influenced Kerr's thought in this respect. He does not mention which particular works Kerr was reading. Those published before Kerr entered Oxford include *Plays Unpleasant*, *Plays Pleasant*, and *Three Plays for Puritans* which appeared during Kerr's early Oxford years. It is possible that *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* may have affected Kerr. The play makes references to intolerance towards creeds that are not Christian, and presents the character, Lady Cicely, rejecting the law of any Church; instead she uses her own

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<sup>60</sup> J.R.M. Butler, *Lord Lothian (Philip Kerr) 1882-1940* (London, 1960) p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> These include R. S. Rait, *The Scottish Parliament Before the Union of the Crowns* (London, 1901); Albert V. Dicey and Robert S. Rait, *Thoughts on the Union Between England and Scotland* (London, 1920); R.S. Rait, *The Parliaments of Scotland* (Glasgow, 1924).

<sup>62</sup> J.R.M. Butler, *Lord Lothian (Philip Kerr) 1882-1940* (London, 1960) p. 7; David P. Billington, Jr., *Lothian, Philip Kerr and the Quest for World Order* (Westport, 2006) p. 6.

common sense and judgment.<sup>63</sup> Shaw was descended from the Protestant ascendancy, the landed gentry that had settled in Ireland after Cromwell's time, although his own upbringing was a poor one. He was not drawn to any Church or sect. He believed in tolerance and criticised institutional churches, such as the Catholic Church, for not being willing to 'liberalise themselves'.<sup>64</sup> It is impossible to prove or to determine Shaw's influence on Kerr's religious thought.<sup>65</sup> It is not unrealistic, however, to suggest that his work led him to question his religion. Until he arrived in Oxford Kerr had always lived in a predominantly Catholic environment. Yet despite his religious doubts surfacing at Oxford, Kerr remained a practising Catholic for some years after. He was not introduced to Christian Science until 1914. Letters to his parents from South Africa between 1905 and 1909 show that he remained devoted to his Catholic faith for some time.

After graduating from Oxford with a first class degree in 1904, Kerr took up a secretarial post in the Transvaal. The British administration was in the process of reconstructing the country following the Boer War (1899-1902). John Buchan, a friend of Kerr's tutor, R.S. Rait, and political secretary to Alfred, Viscount Milner, Governor of the Transvaal, helped to secure Kerr's appointment. Kerr joined Sir Arthur Lawley's staff in 1905. Lawley was Lieutenant Governor of the Transvaal and had served under Ralph Kerr in the Tenth Hussars. Kerr worked for him barely two months before accepting a new position as Robert Brand's secretary at the Inter-Colonial Council and Railway Committee of the four South African colonies.

Kenneth Ingham has written that 'Philip Kerr's years in South Africa from 1905 to 1909 were a period of apprenticeship to the causes which were to occupy him for the

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<sup>63</sup> Annika Ganter 'Shavian Religion in Captain Brassbound's Conversion and St Joan' in *The Journal of The Shaw Society* Vol. 10, No. 7, (Autumn, 2008) pp. 4-17.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>65</sup> As a point of interest, Kerr would visit Russia with George Bernard Shaw and the Astors in 1931. By that time he was a practising Christian Scientist.

rest of his life".<sup>66</sup> As the literature review demonstrated, there has been a great deal written about Alfred Milner and South Africa, and the group of young administrators that surrounded him, known affectionately as 'Milner's Kindergarten'. Kerr's years in South Africa undoubtedly influenced his political thought and future career and therefore it is important to anchor him within the Milnerite Kindergarten tradition. Yet there is still room for some fresh interpretation of his time there as his letters home reveal not only details of his work but also his attitude towards his religion and what he was reading. These details provide clues to his later thoughts on Ireland.

Kerr had been in South Africa only a week before Milner's retirement and return to England. Nevertheless Kerr was quickly absorbed into the 'Kindergarten'. The members were mainly Oxford graduates, recruited by Milner as administrators and as a sounding board for his ideas.<sup>67</sup> Milner had wanted to unify the colonies and republics of South Africa into one dominion 'independent in the management of its own affairs, but still remaining, from its own desire, a member of the great community of free nations gathered under the British flag'.<sup>68</sup> He had no ideological view of the form that union would take, but had come to the conclusion that the 'best practical solution would be to have a strong federal government dealing with customs, railways, defence and, possibly native affairs.'<sup>69</sup> Following his departure in 1905 the Kindergarten aimed to carry on promoting Milner's vision for South Africa under the new High Commissioner, William Waldegrave Palmer, the second Earl of Selbourne. At twenty-three Kerr was the youngest of the group and was treated as such, with

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<sup>66</sup> Kenneth Ingham, 'Philip Kerr and the Unification of South Africa' in John Turner (ed.), *The Larger idea, Lord Lothian and the Problem of National Sovereignty* (London, 1988). p. 20.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>68</sup> Milner's address to the Bloemfontein Town Council, 25 January 1905. Cecil Headlam (ed.), *The Milner Papers* (London, 1933) Vol. II, p. 501, Quoted in Kenneth Ingham, 'Philip Kerr and the Unification of South Africa' in John Turner (ed.), *The Larger idea, Lord Lothian and the Problem of National Sovereignty* (London, 1988) p. 20.

<sup>69</sup> Kenneth Ingham, 'Philip Kerr and the Unification of South Africa' p. 21.

‘indulgent firmness’ by the other members.<sup>70</sup> They would remain his life-long friends, in particular Lionel Curtis and Robert Brand. The group held weekly meetings, or ‘moots’, where they would discuss political affairs and ways by which South African union could be achieved. Kerr remained a firm Unionist while in South Africa, arguing that ‘They [the Liberals] have made a real mess of affairs in natal’.<sup>71</sup> In an earlier letter to his father he wrote that ‘we have just heard that Arthur Balfour has been defeated by 2000 votes and that the Liberals have gained 35 out of the 40 votes polled. I suppose you are all in the depths of despair at this time.’<sup>72</sup>

Kenneth Ingham has discussed the role of the Kindergarten in the eventual unification of South Africa. He argues that they were an elite group who were out of touch with the political trends at home, such as the policies of the new Liberal government of 1905. Ingham explains that the commitment of the Kindergarten to their cause ‘sometimes blinded them to the fact that their own role was a relatively minor one.’<sup>73</sup> For Kerr, the effort to promote South African union was a valuable experience that ‘sharpened his organisational abilities’, while discussions with the Kindergarten ‘sharpened his intellect and encouraged his critical faculties’.<sup>74</sup> In the later months of 1906 the Kindergarten had set about drafting what became known as the ‘Selborne Memorandum’, an argument in favour of closer union of the South African states, to be presented to the British public. Kerr’s own contribution was in relation to the railways, arguing that they could only operate efficiently if centrally controlled.<sup>75</sup> The drafting was done in secret and Kerr begged his parents’ discretion

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>71</sup> Philip Kerr to Lord Ralph Kerr, 1 April 1906, Lothian Papers GD40/17/454/16.

<sup>72</sup> Philip Kerr to Lord Ralph Kerr, 14 Jan 1906, Lothian Papers GD40/17/454/4.

<sup>73</sup> Kenneth Ingham, ‘Philip Kerr and the Unification of South Africa’ p. 32.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

when writing to them.<sup>76</sup> The memorandum was generally well received in the press, yet the Kindergarten believed that federation would be a long, drawn out process. They continued their efforts throughout 1907 and early 1908, establishing a weekly newspaper *The State*, edited by Kerr, that put forward arguments for closer union in South Africa.

When federation of South Africa did come about it happened very quickly and the Kindergarten were 'overtaken by events' when Jan Smuts and J.X. Merriman introduced their plans for union in March 1908.<sup>77</sup> Ingham writes that 'The Kindergarten themselves had little doubt that they had played an important part in bringing about the unification of South Africa', while arguing 'It is unlikely...that the Kindergarten had saved South Africa for the British Empire'.<sup>78</sup> He explains that as an elite group concerned with political ideas, there was a great gulf dividing the Kindergarten from those who bore the practical burden of government. This would be a criticism levelled at them in their later incarnation as 'The Round Table' group. It is a convincing argument as Kerr would not fully understand the real difficulties of governing until he worked for Lloyd George at Downing Street. Nevertheless South Africa prepared Kerr for his later roles as editor, draftsman and secretary to the Prime Minister. His capacity for hard work was astonishing and commented on by his peers. It is little wonder that his health suffered during the course of his life. Nevertheless, his colleague, Robert Brand, wrote to Philip's mother in 1906 telling her that Philip was in good health despite the fact that he had worked for a year without a holiday and 'ought to have one soon'. Brand continued:

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<sup>76</sup> Philip Kerr to Lady Anne Kerr, Dec 1906, Lothian Papers GD40/17/454/59; Philip Kerr to Lord Ralph Kerr, 16 Dec 1906, Lothian Papers GD40/17/454/60.

<sup>77</sup> Kenneth Ingham, 'Philip Kerr and the Unification of South Africa', p. 28-29.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.



As to his work, there is only one opinion among everyone. Of them, the High Commissioner, Duncan, Farrar, Hichens and the Railway Officials, most of whom are our natural enemies say the same thing, that he has done extraordinarily well. They all seem struck not only with his clear headedness, but with the tremendous industry he has shown. It is a great thing that he can take a lot of work and calmness without getting fussed.<sup>79</sup>

Kerr remained a practising Catholic during his years in South Africa, attending the sacraments and making an effort to mix with other Catholics. In a letter to his mother in December 1905 he described how he had walked across an open plain at night in danger of his life 'except that ... [he had] a loaded revolver' in his pocket, so that he could attend confession.<sup>80</sup> Kerr would have been anxious to confess so that he could take Holy Communion on Christmas Day. Unlike Easter, Catholics were not obligated to take Communion at Christmas and therefore this suggests some devotion on Kerr's part. In a later letter to his father he tells of his shame at the 'limited nature of my religious and charitable performances' and hence joined the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, also making 'a variety of other efforts to get in touch with Catholics here'.<sup>81</sup> Kerr did not present himself as a saint-like being; rather he struggled with his piety. He told his father on one occasion that 'The reason why I so seldom refer to religious matters, is that there is never anything to chronicle - except the tale of my soul, which is, I'm afraid, not too exemplary'.<sup>82</sup> Robert Brand wrote in 1960 that 'It was quite apparent indeed in South Africa that he was not an ardent Catholic. Yet he

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<sup>79</sup> Robert Brand to Lady Anne Kerr, 3 March 1906, Lothian Papers GD40/17/455/1.

<sup>80</sup> Philip Kerr to Lady Anne Kerr, 25 Dec 1905, Lothian Papers GD40/17/453/67.

<sup>81</sup> Philip Kerr to Lord Ralph Kerr, 22 Dec 1907, Lothian Papers GD40/17/456/63.

<sup>82</sup> Philip Kerr to Lord Ralph Kerr, 8 Oct 1906, Lothian Papers GD40/17/454/49.

held out for long'.<sup>83</sup> Brand, who thought that his own father was an agnostic, believed that it was Kerr's eight years at the Roman Catholic Oratory School in Birmingham that shaped the rest of his life, as Kerr never forgot its teachings and found it intolerable to have no definite religion.

If it was apparent to Brand that Kerr was not an ardent Catholic during his time in South Africa then it was not so to others. Following a visit to South Africa in 1907 a cousin, William H. Kerr, wrote to Philip's father reporting that 'I think that you and Anne will be pleased to hear that I have ascertained that he is spoken of in Johannesburg as an "Edifying Catholic"...going to his duties regularly and frequently'.<sup>84</sup> Brand may thus have been wrong in 1960 and speaking with the benefit of hindsight. Kerr's letters home suggest that Catholicism was very much a part of his every day life, and inherent in who he was. On one occasion he expressed concern to his father that he could not find his crucifix which he used to lay on his dressing table.<sup>85</sup> In another letter to his sister, Margaret, he wrote to her describing the Bishop, claiming that he had an ugly face. He told her 'Even the Bishop himself argued that the best way was not to eat fish on Fridays as it was a "luxury"!'.<sup>86</sup> Kerr was quite serious in encouraging his younger brother, David, in his own religious duties. He wrote to him saying 'I suppose you will begin on Retreat before very long...I used to like the retreats, I hope you will too. The only boys who didn't like them were the ones who didn't try to keep them properly'.<sup>87</sup>

Kerr's attitude towards religion is clearer in a letter to his mother written in 1907. She had asked him about the religious beliefs of his colleagues, Patrick Duncan and Lionel Hitchens. He replied:

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<sup>83</sup> R.H. Brand, 'Philip Kerr: Some Personal Memories' in *The Round Table* (June, 1960), pp. 234-243.

<sup>84</sup> William H. Kerr to Lord Ralph Kerr, 18 Dec 1907, Lothian Papers, GD40/17/456/62.

<sup>85</sup> Philip Kerr to Lord Ralph Kerr, 8 Oct 1906, Lothian Papers GD40/17/454/49.

<sup>86</sup> Philip Kerr to Margaret Kerr, 2 April 1905, Lothian Papers GD40/17/453/18.

<sup>87</sup> Philip Kerr to David Kerr, 14 Jan 1906, Lothian Papers GD40/17/454/3.



Religion is not a matter of intellect – though it is an intellectual process to formalise what you mean of religion ...one's exact beliefs must take different forms according to the quality and capacity of one's mind. What exactly the Catholic religion means to a backward Irish peasant is obviously very different to what it means to you or father.<sup>88</sup>

Kerr identified with his social class when it came to religion, and it seems that his former connection with Ireland had heightened his sense of superiority. He was probably referring to the superstitious quality linked to the religious life of the Irish peasantry. Kerr's family were followers of Cardinal Newman, who was associated with intellectual thought. Lord Ralph Kerr had attended his funeral in 1890 and Philip had been educated at the school that he founded. Philip had spent time with Catholic intellectuals such as Wilfrid Ward. He may have claimed that 'Religion is not a matter of intellect' yet he associated his own strain of Catholicism with an intellectual and elevated form. For Kerr, this seems to have been a class divide and not a national one. He did not necessarily single the Irish out as he also wrote that 'People here [South Africa] are the most non religious in the world. There are very few of even the psalm saying ruffian type'.<sup>89</sup>

Meanwhile South Africa gave Kerr a new philosophy in the shape of imperialism. For the rest of his life he would believe in the supremacy of the British Empire and her dominions. Kerr read the work of Richard Jebb while in South Africa. He wrote to his father in 1906 about a book by 'a man called Richard Jebb entitled Colonial Nationalism'. He continued 'I strongly advise you get it and read it. It is

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<sup>88</sup> Philip Kerr to Lady Anne Kerr, 11 May 1907, Lothian Papers GD40/17/456/23.

<sup>89</sup> Philip Kerr to Lady Anne Kerr, 15 Oct 1906, Lothian Papers GD40/17/454/60.

extraordinarily good, and throws a tremendous lot of light on the relations between Britain and her colonies.'<sup>90</sup> Kerr's reading of Jebb throws some light onto his own thoughts at this early stage of his career. Kerr told his father 'he is absolutely right...It is a book I think we should have in the house – a classic in its own time'.<sup>91</sup> Jebb was born in Ellesmere, Shropshire, in 1874. His father, Arthur Trevor Jebb, was a landowner and his mother, Eglantyne Louisa and his father's distant cousin, was the daughter of Robert Jebb of Killiney, Ireland. Jebb was educated at Marlborough and New College, Oxford, later becoming a publicist and theorist on imperial themes. After winning a prize at school for an essay on imperial federation, the Empire became his life's principal concern.<sup>92</sup> While travelling the self-governing colonies between 1898 and 1901 Jebb gathered valuable material for his ideas on colonial nationalism, later publishing his *Studies in Colonial Nationalism* in 1905, and as a result gained public recognition.<sup>93</sup>

The work considers Jebb's view of imperial evolution, based on the experiences of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. In his preface, he set out his thoughts on the colonial ideal and specified what he considered to be the problems associated with colonial rule. In particular, he supported the notion of an alliance between the mother country and the self-governing colonies rather than the principle of federation. According to Jebb, an alliance system was preferable as it would recognise separate national aspirations. Federation, on the other hand, suggested a growing consciousness of common nationality, which he did not believe existed. He argued that Britain's pitfall was the idea that the self-governing colonies could be treated as a whole and if this idea continued then there would be no hope of closer

<sup>90</sup> Philip Kerr to Lord Ralph Kerr, 1 April 1906, Lothian Papers, GD40/17/454/16.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> J. D. Miller, 'Jebb, Richard (1874–1953)', rev., *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004, Online edition Jan 2008.

<sup>93</sup> Richard Jebb, *Studies in Colonial Nationalism* (London, 1905).

union. Jebb believed that in order to achieve closer union Britain would have to accept the differences inherent in the various nations. In his opinion there were two main features common to the four nations that he was exploring: firstly that they were all travelling the road from colonial to national status; and secondly that the development of national consciousness in each was a process of internal friction. Jebb looked to the imperial statesmen to recognise these factors and to accept them if any form of union was to be maintained. He criticised Britain more heavily in the main body of his text. He credited Rudyard Kipling, another ardent imperialist and acquaintance of Kerr's in South Africa, as being the first 'prophet of imperial truth', that is, the first to recognise the realities of the new nations.<sup>94</sup> This recognition involved the separate aspirations and patriotism of these younger nations and their assumed loyalties to Britain. Jebb explored the nationalism that he believed to exist in places such as Australia, with the example that it had its own nationalist poetry. Britain was therefore seen as greatly mistaken in trying to enforce her own supremacy and in failing to recognise the separate national sentiment of the colonies. From Jebb's point of view, if she did not then the new nations would eventually break away and the union would be merely 'an empty vision'.<sup>95</sup> Jebb predicted that 'In the fullness of time the children shall surpass their grey mother, in all save honour. The imperial city shall lose her pride of place.'<sup>96</sup>

Kerr would later echo Jebb's arguments in his work *The Prevention of War* and in what he perceived to be the problem of national sovereignty.<sup>97</sup> Yet the difference between Kerr and Jebb was that the former would come to see federalism as a solution to international problems, as it would address issues common to all states,

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 327.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 335.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 336.

<sup>97</sup> Philip Kerr and Lionel Curtis, *The Prevention of War* (New Haven, 1923).

while recognising their separate issues, whereas Jebb saw federalism as promoting separate national aspirations. Kerr urged his father to ensure that Jebb's work became a part of their own library on account of it being 'a classic in its own time'. But although Jebb was among the most prominent of imperial publicists his influence rapidly waned and his public reputation diminished. J.D. Miller has explained that Jebb recognised colonial nationalism, not as merely separatism but as a complex local feeling and attachment to Britain. He argues, however, that the imperial federationists, and in particular the Round Table group headed by Lionel Curtis, did not understand the strength of this sentiment and therefore that their own proposals would fail.<sup>98</sup> Nevertheless, reading works such as Jebb's opened Kerr's mind to possible solutions to the problems associated with imperial government. Kerr's experiences in South Africa and his association with the Kindergarten had consolidated his imperial thought and led him to develop it further.

Kerr was devouring a wide range of material in South Africa and there is evidence of him reading works by Irish political figures. In the same letter that Kerr advised his father to read Jebb's *Colonial Nationalism*, he also said that 'There is another book that we ought to have if you haven't already got it "The New Century in Ireland" by Horace Plunkett. I have been reading it here'.<sup>99</sup> Kerr would later correspond with Plunkett whilst acting as Lloyd George's secretary. Plunkett was an agricultural reformer and politician. A member of the landed class, he founded a movement in which rural communities could work together for improved agricultural production, processing and distribution.<sup>100</sup> He had learned a great deal from his own experiences ranching in America and therefore came to believe that the Irish farmer

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<sup>98</sup> J. D. Miller, 'Jebb, Richard (1874–1953)', rev., *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004. Online Edition, Jan 2008.

<sup>99</sup> Philip Kerr to Lord Ralph Kerr, 1 April 1906, Lothian Papers GD40/17/454/16.

<sup>100</sup> Philip Bull, 'Plunkett, Sir Horace Curzon (1854–1932)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edition, Jan 2008.

needed greater independence and autonomy. In *Ireland in the New Century* he set out a comprehensive statement of his philosophy.<sup>101</sup> There was a varied response to Plunkett's work and it was not uniformly well received. It also isolated the author as, against the advice of friends, he included attacks on the role of the Catholic clergy in Irish society and on the Irish people 'for their lack of moral fibre'.<sup>102</sup> One review, however, declared that Plunkett's case was a complicated one, and that it was rare that an author had the courage to express such a valuable opinion so openly. It was explained that Plunkett's criticisms were directed to the improvement of industrial character and not against any one group, be it Orangemen, Catholics, Unionists or Nationalists.<sup>103</sup>

During this period the Irish Parliamentary party was no longer as strong as it once had been in the 1880s. The fall of Parnell had weakened the party and his ultimate successor, John Redmond, attempted to carry on his legacy and continue to fight for the Home Rule cause. This period also saw the rise of Sinn Féin and the formation of the Ulster Unionist Council. These elements together saw the political scene in Ireland change dramatically. Although Redmond would actually see Home Rule put on the statute books in 1914 the party would never regain its former support as it failed to move with the changing times. Plunkett tended to disparage politics and argued that the methods employed for the attainment of Home Rule had been injurious to the industrial character of the people.<sup>104</sup> He did recognise, however, that an engagement with politics was necessary. But it is difficult to define his political ideals. Plunkett won a seat for South County Dublin as a Unionist in 1892 with the

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<sup>101</sup> Horace Plunkett, *Ireland in the New Century* (with a foreword by Trevor West), (Dublin, 1982).

<sup>102</sup> Philip Bull, 'Plunkett, Sir Horace Curzon (1854–1932)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edition, Jan 2008.

<sup>103</sup> F.Y. Edgeworth, 'Reviewed Works: *Ireland in the New Century* by Horace Plunkett' *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 55. (Sept, 1904), pp. 430–433.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

aim of promoting his ideas, and he maintained an ambivalent attitude to nationalism. Philip Bull has noted, however, that it was in Sinn Féin that Plunkett found a nationalism with which he was able to identify due to its attachment to common ideas of self-reliance and moral regeneration. He was committed to the idea of Irish nationality rather than 'the specific forms taken by nationalism'.<sup>105</sup> His nationalism had become overt by the time he was appointed chair of the Irish Convention of 1917-18 and his main aim became to avoid partition. This fact is particularly interesting considering Kerr's later involvement in the partition of Ireland and his connection with Plunkett. Kerr would also receive advice from George W. Russell ('Æ') whose work *Social Silhouettes* he read while in South Africa.<sup>106</sup> Plunkett and Russell illustrate Kerr's interest in Ireland during his time in South Africa and also forge a link between his early career and his later work in Irish affairs.

The points raised in this chapter provide new background to the work that Philip Kerr would carry out in relation to Ireland between 1916 and 1921. He was born into an aristocratic, Catholic family opposed to devolution for Ireland. As a major-general in the late Victorian army, Kerr's father, Lord Ralph Kerr, was in charge of maintaining law and order there while based at the Curragh from 1891 until 1896. As a child Philip spent some time in Ireland and would have been exposed to Irish religious and political life. He would have certainly come into contact with the Irish clergy and perhaps such controversial figures as Cardinal Logue and James Lynch. Logue would be outspoken in the Irish national cause in later years, when Kerr was at Downing Street. If Kerr did not encounter such figures as a child then his family most certainly did. In addition this chapter has demonstrated that Kerr had an interest in Irish affairs through such acquaintances as Wilfrid Ward and through his reading in

<sup>105</sup> Philip Bull, 'Plunkett, Sir Horace Curzon (1854-1932)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, September 2004; online edition, January 2008.

<sup>106</sup> Philip Kerr to Lord Ralph Kerr, 29 Dec 1906, Lothian Papers GD40/17/454/62.

South Africa. Meanwhile Kerr began to develop an imperial philosophy and a belief in the need for federation as a means of governing the British Empire. His membership of the Kindergarten prepared him for the work he would undertake as a member of the Round Table and as the Prime Minister's secretary; work that would have a direct impact on Ireland and her future.

## **Chapter 3**

### **The Round Table and Ireland 1910-1916**

The period between 1910 and 1916 was significant for both Philip Kerr and for Anglo-Irish politics. For Kerr it was a time of high responsibility as he became one of the founding members of the Round Table Movement for Imperial Federation and editor of its quarterly journal. This quickly developed into a movement for federation of the United Kingdom as well as the Empire, and for this reason Kerr was drawn into the debate about Ireland. During these years he would also face bouts of illness and a deep personal crisis relating to his religion. This led him to take time out from his work and in the course of this period he drew closer to Nancy Astor, who would become his life long friend and confidant. Meanwhile Anglo-Irish politics went through an eventful period with the introduction of the third Home Rule Bill in 1912 and Home Rule finally placed on the statute books in 1914, although this was postponed due to the outbreak of the First World War. The 1916 Easter Rebellion in Dublin then caused political upheaval and the British government faced criticism as a result of its swift execution of the rebel leaders. This chapter explores the development of Kerr's thought on the Irish question between 1910 and 1916, in view of his membership of the Round Table and his other experiences during these years.

Kerr left South Africa and returned to Britain in June 1909 along with Lionel Curtis and Robert Brand. They sailed to England on the same boat as the delegates carrying the Bill of Union for South Africa to Westminster. As explained in Chapter 2, the Kindergarten members believed that they had saved South Africa for the British Empire and were full of enthusiasm for what they might further achieve as a group.



Kerr left South Africa a convinced imperialist and intended to enter politics on his return home. Letters he sent to his parents between 1905 and 1909 reveal that he was following in his family's Unionist tradition. Following the Liberal landslide in the 1906 general election Kerr wrote to his father:

Luckily the Liberals have already done their worst about Chinese Labour, so I hope they will now leave South Africa and concentrate their energies on problems at home.<sup>1</sup>

After learning of the committee appointed to deal with the constitution for the Transvaal, which included H.H. Asquith and Winston Churchill, Kerr wrote:

It is the best of a lot of bad news that we've heard lately...Being young and inexperienced I am still optimistic, and fully believe things will come right in the long run and that because people are liberals or socialists they are not necessarily knaves as well as fools.<sup>2</sup>

Later, in May 1907, Kerr commented to his father that the 'government at home seem to have got into a pretty good mess over the Home Rule Bill. It's another nail in their coffin'.<sup>3</sup> Presumably he was referring to the Irish Council Bill introduced by the Liberal government on 7 May. The Bill provided for a scheme in which an administrative council would advise and assist the government of Ireland. It was a similar proposal to Joseph Chamberlain's 'central board' scheme of the 1880s.<sup>4</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Kerr to Lord Ralph Kerr, 14 Jan 1906, Lothian Papers GD40/17/454/4.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Kerr to Lord Ralph Kerr, 12 Feb 1906, Lothian Papers GD40/17/454/9.

<sup>3</sup> Philip Kerr to Lord Ralph Kerr, 27 May 1907, Lothian Papers GD40/17/456/26.

<sup>4</sup> John Kendle, *Ireland and the Federal Solution* (Kingston, 1989) p. 98.

Irish Nationalist leaders, John Redmond, John Dillon and T.P O'Connor, were opposed to the Bill. It did not make provision for direct popular elections and they refused to support the policy unless it could be seen as a step in the direction of further reforms.<sup>5</sup> A revised version of the Bill was later withdrawn by the government. As previously noted, Kerr's father had publicly opposed Gladstone's second Home Rule Bill of 1893 and it is reasonable to suggest that Kerr was also anti-Home Rule at this stage in his career.

Some months before Kerr left South Africa he had arranged for his father to set the groundwork in securing a Unionist candidacy in Scotland. The former reported to Lord Ralph that 'apparently our little schemes for golf etc. with Arthur Balfour have had, and are still having effect'. He was however aware of the potential difficulty of his religious affiliation:

I wish I could have been behind him [Balfour]...and heard myself discussed. I can well imagine the Buccleugh family weighing up the difficulties which would stand in the way of a Catholic being elected for any constituency in which they exerted any influence.<sup>6</sup>

Kerr consulted Simon Joseph Fraser, the Fourteenth Lord Lovat, regarding a seat in the Catholic districts in the north of Scotland. The Frasers, like the Kerrs, were also Catholic members of the Scottish peerage. Lovat had thought it was a useless quest as he believed all of the northern seats would vote solidly Liberal until the impending Land Act was passed. He gave Kerr some hope, however, suggesting that religion did not count so much in the south. Kerr told his mother that Lovat's view 'was that in a

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>6</sup> Philip Kerr to Lord Ralph Kerr, 16 Dec 1908, Lothian Papers GD40/17/457/53.

border constituency my name would more than counteract my religion'.<sup>7</sup> The following month Kerr urged his father to visit Arthur Balfour at his home, Whittinghame, to 'just remind him of Uncle Schomberg, and the family connections'.<sup>8</sup> By May he was confident that he had 'enlisted the support of quite a lot of people, Balfour, Curzon, Walter Long and Selborne. So things ought to be managed somehow'.<sup>9</sup>

Kerr had formed these career plans before leaving South Africa. On his return however, he became swept up in Lionel Curtis' enthusiasm and found himself following quite a different path. Their experiences in South Africa had left the Kindergarten convinced of the need for Imperial federation if Britain was to maintain efficient government over all of her dependencies. They believed in Milner's vision of:

a group of states, independent of one another in their local affairs, but bound together for the defence of their common interests and the development of a common civilisation, and so bound, not in an alliance...but in a permanent organic union<sup>10</sup>

Lionel Curtis outlined a campaign to federate the Empire. He proposed to recruit small groups of men in each dominion with a central group in London. Each would publish a magazine based on *The State* that Kerr had edited in South Africa and debate a statement on the imperial problem drafted by the central group. When all of

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<sup>7</sup> Philip Kerr to Lady Anne Kerr, 8 March 1909, Lothian Papers GD40/17/458.

<sup>8</sup> Philip Kerr to Lord Ralph Kerr, 4 April 1909, Lothian Papers GD40/17/458.

<sup>9</sup> Philip Kerr to Lady Anne Kerr, 9 May 1909, Lothian Papers GD40/17/458/26.

<sup>10</sup> Pamphlet, *Speeches Delivered by his Excellency Viscount Milner at the Public Banquets Given in his Honour at Germiston, Pretoria and Johannesburg on the Eve of his Departure from South Africa, 1905* Lothian Papers, GD40/17/1/2.

the groups had agreed on some form of federation as the solution, then the movement would be publicly launched.<sup>11</sup> The plan was adopted by a meeting of Lord Milner and the Kindergarten members on the Anglesey estate at Plas Newydd in Wales between the 4 and 6 September 1909. They agreed that their main objective was ‘the discovery of some form of federation which shall be at once effective and acceptable – by comparison with disruption – to the various Dominions’.<sup>12</sup> An office was to be established in London with Kerr as the secretary, as well as editor of what would become *The Round Table*, the same name that the group would give to themselves. The title itself suggests that they viewed themselves as young romantics with a crusading aim.

Kerr’s parents supported his decision to abandon his plans for a parliamentary career to take on his Round Table responsibilities. Lord Ralph Kerr informed Philip that the county committee had voted for him as a candidate, presumably for the 1910 general election. He did not however want his son to infer from this that either he or Lady Anne wanted him to accept the offer; the choice was Philip’s to make freely. Lord Ralph Kerr counselled:

I feel that you before all things owe absolute loyalty to your present employers, who have a right to your whole service, and have given you a start...The Imperial interests for which you are working are a grand work. Of course the committee want to get a candidate for Parliament, but there are other fish in the sea...Let your record be one above the average for a sense of

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<sup>11</sup> David P. Billington, Jr., *Lothian: Philip Kerr and the Quest for World Order* (Westport, 2006) p. 19.  
<sup>12</sup> John Kendle, *The Round Table Movement and Imperial Union* (Toronto, 1975). p. 64.

honour...Let Milner feel that he can rely absolutely on you, it will pay in the end.<sup>13</sup>

Kerr's mother supported this stance and helped to persuade him against the offer of a candidacy.<sup>14</sup> Yet there may have been another reason for his parents' advice. The January election of 1910 had produced a hung parliament and Kerr's chances of a parliamentary seat would depend on the Conservatives, led by Arthur Balfour, breaking the deadlock. Kerr's imperial work may thus have appeared a more secure option for the time being. Following the Plas Newydd meeting Kerr and Curtis embarked on a fact finding tour of Canada, Britain's largest dominion, to explore the sentiment for closer imperial union. During meetings in January 1910, Milner and the Kindergarten decided to proceed with their plans.<sup>15</sup>

As the literature review demonstrated, John Kendle has explored the role of the Round Table and a federal solution to the Irish problem at length in his fine work on the subject. Equally, there have been important studies of Irish Home Rule and the federalist debate in the United Kingdom between 1910 and 1914.<sup>16</sup> Although some consideration of the Round Table will be necessary in the pages that follow, it is not the intention to cover the same ground here. Rather, the aim is to build on the excellent work already undertaken by considering Kerr's personal perspective of events during these years, and how this fits in to the wider frame of his later work on Ireland.

As the Round Table was beginning its crusade Britain was on the verge of a constitutional crisis. This came about when House of Lords refused to pass the

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<sup>13</sup> Lord Ralph Kerr to Philip Kerr, 7 April 1910, Lothian Papers GD40/17/460/1.

<sup>14</sup> Lady Anne Kerr to Philip Kerr, 8 April 1910, Lothian Papers GD40/17/460/2.

<sup>15</sup> David P. Billington, Jr., *Lothian: Philip Kerr and the Quest for World Order*, p. 19-20.

<sup>16</sup> Most notably Alvin Jackson's *Home Rule: An Irish History* (London, 2004).

'People's Budget' of 1909. As a result the Liberal Party, under H.H. Asquith, introduced a parliamentary bill removing the Lords' veto on financial legislation and restricting their veto elsewhere to a two years delay. The crisis potentially threatened imperial welfare and therefore the Round Table members, along with influential outsiders, including F.S. Oliver, Leopold Amery and Lord Robert Cecil, saw an opportunity to consider constitutional reform of the United Kingdom. Again, John Kendle, and also Patricia Jalland, have both discussed the federalist project for the British Isles in detail in their respective works.<sup>17</sup> The theory was that to gain more efficient administration over its dependencies abroad, Britain would first have to put her internal affairs in order. Federalisation of the United Kingdom was thought to be a workable solution. The group adopted a strategy of trying to influence politicians through correspondence, and the public with the use of pamphlets and F.S. Oliver's *Pacificus* letters to *The Times*.<sup>18</sup> As a result of this shift from an imperial United Kingdom to a federation, the group began to consider the Irish question more carefully as a problem that had dominated British politics for decades.

The Round Table was not the first group, or indeed individuals, to suggest federal schemes for Ireland, and the federal idea meant different things to different people. The prospect of federalism had been raised as far back as the 1840s when Sharman Crawford, an Ulster landlord, advocated a scheme in which Ireland would retain the union with Great Britain for the sake of wider concerns while an Irish parliament would deal with domestic affairs. He also believed that separate parliaments for England and Scotland should be included in this scheme. Like F.S. Oliver, Crawford was inspired by American federal principles. Daniel O'Connell himself, the great

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<sup>17</sup> John Kendle, *Ireland and the Federal Solution* (Kingston, 1989); Patricia Jalland, 'United Kingdom Devolution 1910-1914: Political Panacea or Tactical Diversion?' *The English Historical Review*, vol. 94, No. 373 (October, 1979).

<sup>18</sup> Patricia Jalland, 'United Kingdom Devolution 1910-1914', p. 761.

leader of the Repeal movement had briefly flirted with the federal idea as enthusiasm grew for it in the early to mid 1840s. As a devoted supporter of Queen Victoria, O'Connell wanted an independent Ireland under the Queen; two kingdoms under one ruler. He also announced his 'preference for the federative plan' in the 'Derrynane manifesto' of October 1844.<sup>19</sup> Yet he quickly retreated to 'simple repeal' following the outcry from his supporters and the realisation that the federal idea would alienate them. Alvin Jackson has noted that the vagueness of repeal had been a source of strength, given the extent and diversity of the popular movement. He further explains that the "Derrynane manifesto" highlighted the dangers involved when a leader sought to exchange the generous ambiguities of the national cause for a more specific programme'.<sup>20</sup>

In the late 1870s Isaac Butt also took up the federal cause.<sup>21</sup> Butt, a Donegal Protestant, had rejected O'Connellite repeal. In maintaining the union he believed that Ireland could have her say in the government of a great empire. He distinguished his own plan of federal Home Rule from repeal, claiming that federalism would offer Ireland an opportunity for independence without breaking up the unity of the Empire, interfering with the monarchy or endangering the rights or liberties of any class of Irishmen.<sup>22</sup>

Butt founded the Home Government Association in May 1870 and in doing so launched the concept of Home Rule with its constitutional focus. The term 'Home Rule' was thought to have been first used by Joseph A. Galbraith, a member of the Home Government Association, in order to maximise the movement's appeal.

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<sup>19</sup> Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule, An Irish History 1800-2000*, p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> David Thornley's *Isaac Butt and Home Rule* (London, 1964) provides an in depth analysis of Butt's contribution to Home Rule.

<sup>22</sup> Alan O'Day, 'Butt, Isaac (1813–1879)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2008.



Although Butt won widespread support, his achievements would be eclipsed with the rise of Charles Stewart Parnell and his own campaign for Home Rule in the 1880s. Parnell initially won much Fenian support through tying Home Rule in with the land question, the great Irish political issue of the day. The 1881 Land Act, and the Kilmainham Treaty that effectively ended the Land War, enabled him to campaign for Home Rule by constitutional means. Again, like O'Connell, Butt, and later the Round Table, Parnell kept his approach to Home Rule deliberately vague. Home Rule was many things to many different political and social groups. Alvin Jackson has written, 'in the diversity of the cause lay both its strength and its fragility'.<sup>23</sup>

Prime Minister W.E. Gladstone's conversion to the cause in the mid 1880s meant that for a time Home Rule developed into a better defined concept. The Home Rule Bill of 1886 envisaged a local assembly in Dublin that would deal with Ireland's internal affairs while the Imperial Parliament at Westminster would retain control of foreign matters, security and taxation. Gladstone had used the Canadian model when drafting the first Home Rule Bill in 1885, although the Dublin parliament was to have more limited powers than its Canadian counterpart.<sup>24</sup> In trying to develop a Home Rule scheme there remained unresolved problems, such as the question of taxation, representation and, not least, the failure to address the interests of Protestant Ulster. Gladstone's 1886 Bill was defeated in the Commons and actually split the Liberal Party. His 1893 Bill was passed in the Commons on its third reading but rejected by the House of Lords. It was not until the Round Table group's arrival on the British political scene that there had been such an organised movement for devolution of the whole United Kingdom.

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<sup>23</sup> Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule, An Irish History 1800-2000*, p. 11.

<sup>24</sup> Eugenio F. Biagini, *Gladstone* (London, 2000) p. 103.

In exploring Kerr's approach to the Irish question during this period it is important to contextualise the evolution of federal ideas for Ireland. Only then can his position be fully understood. Kerr was not fully convinced by the federal project for the United Kingdom. As the previous chapter demonstrated, his own father had been opposed to Gladstonian Home Rule. His primary goal at this time was imperial federation. He did not believe that it was necessary to federate the United Kingdom before imperial federation could be achieved. David Billington has discussed this issue in his biography of Kerr. He has observed that Kerr actually tried to restrain the Round Table's enthusiasm for United Kingdom devolution. In a letter to Curtis in 1910 Kerr asked 'Is Ireland to be a Canada or a Quebec?'. In other words, Billington notes that Kerr was asking if Ireland would have the autonomy of a dominion or the more limited government of a Canadian province.<sup>25</sup> Although the Round Table members preferred the latter, Kerr still urged caution. He posed the question: 'what part, if any, has the present movement for federalising the United Kingdom to play in the march to Imperial Unity?'; and answered: 'Strictly it has none, for its ostensible object is to entrust the control of "purely Irish" affairs to local assemblies – even the Irish Nationalists only ask for this – leaving national and imperial affairs to the present imperial parliament'.<sup>26</sup> It was Kerr's view that the ultimate goal was imperial unity. Considering the practicalities of any devolved United Kingdom government, he pointed out that there would be more difficult issues in the various regions of Scotland and Wales than simply administrative ones. Amongst these, he included the concerns of churchmen in Wales regarding the control of the Welsh church and the worries of Scottish landowners at the possibility of a radical assembly in Edinburgh. It seems that Kerr recognised that a federal Ireland would have difficulties in

<sup>25</sup> David P. Billington, Jr., *Lothian: Philip Kerr and the Quest for World Order*, p. 31.

<sup>26</sup> Philip Kerr to Lionel Curtis, 30 Sept 1910, Lothian Papers GD40/17/2/103.

reconciling Ulster, so other parts of the United Kingdom would also have challenges to confront.

Despite his caution Kerr knew the history of Home Rule and the terminology used in promoting such schemes for Ireland. He recognised that the term 'federalism' could be problematic but it was the best option available. The problem arose from the fact that it came from the American model of government and Kerr explained to Curtis that 'under no scheme would there be a supreme court to interpret the constitution. The imperial parliament would remain supreme'.<sup>27</sup> This would be different from the American system. Yet Kerr believed that:

it [Federalism] is a good fighting word. [To] begin with Devolution has noisome associations. Home Rule all Round worse, Federalism has been a success everywhere and people will therefore not be inclined to fight shy of the word, - a great advantage.<sup>28</sup>

He appears to have been clearer than his colleagues on what exactly the Round Table's purpose was at this time. It never defined or adopted a federal plan; initially its main aim was to get federalism discussed at the Constitutional Conference in July-November 1910. Kerr had:

little hope that anything practical will come out of the conference...But whatever the outcome of the conference, I believe we shall have Federalism discussed next year as a possible line of advance. That is a tremendous gain.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Philip Kerr to Lionel Curtis, 10 Aug 1910, Lothian Papers GD40/17/2/91.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Philip Kerr to Lionel Curtis, 10 Aug 1910, Lothian Papers GD40/17/2/90.

He thought that if federalism was discussed as a serious option for constitutional reform then it was only a matter of time before one of the political parties adopted the policy in some form or other. At that stage, Kerr explained, that the process of educating the people would begin in earnest. To have implemented a scheme in 1910 would have required a powerful advocate. Kerr told Curtis 'Only a man of Gladstonian force, or with Joe's personality [Joseph Chamberlain] could educate the mass of the people sufficiently rapidly in Federalism'.<sup>30</sup> In the meantime, he stated that 'our business is to work out the plan in detail and test its practicability' and further explained that their main aim was to 'make people more familiar with the idea of Federation, so that they will be all the more ready to swallow our gospel when it is published'.<sup>31</sup> Two of the main criticisms made of the Round Table are that it failed to define a precise scheme of federalisation and did not educate the ordinary citizens. Kerr's letter to Curtis suggests that in 1910 he was aware of these potential pitfalls and it is tempting to speculate that the project might have achieved greater success had he not become detached through illness in 1911-14. This will be discussed in further detail below.

Kerr was writing to Curtis while the latter was touring New Zealand, Australia and Canada to meet with dominion groups in order to exchange ideas. During this time Kerr kept him up to date on developments at home. In 1910 he told Curtis that he had had a long talk with Lord Grey (Albert Henry George, the Fourth Earl Grey and Governor-General of Canada) who had devised a scheme for withdrawing American financial support from John Redmond, the Irish Parliamentary Party leader, and transferring it to William O'Brien if the latter would adopt the federal solution.<sup>32</sup> This might have been no more than an attempt to split the Home Rule Party as there is

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Philip Kerr to Lionel Curtis, 31 Aug 1910, Lothian Papers GD40/17/2.

<sup>32</sup> Philip Kerr to Lionel Curtis, 10 Aug 1910, Lothian Papers GD40/17/2/85.

reason to suggest that Redmond was also considering federalism in 1910. Michael Wheatley has written about this, arguing that historians have tended to ignore Redmond's federalist views as they would complicate the perceived position of Irish Nationalists during this period.<sup>33</sup> Redmond gave an interview to a New York newspaper, commenting 'What I mean by absolute Home Rule is a Parliament in Ireland with such control over State affairs as State Governments have over State affairs in America, leaving to the Imperial Parliament at Westminster all such affairs as you call federal'.<sup>34</sup> This was of course aimed at an American audience, yet T.P. O'Connor, part of the inner leadership of the Irish Parliamentary Party, made numerous statements in full support of a federal solution, suggesting that Redmond had to be thinking along the same lines. In 1910 the *New York Sun* published an interview with Redmond. 'We are strongly in favour of a Federal Empire', he was reported to have said, 'and once we receive Home Rule we shall demonstrate our loyalty beyond question.'<sup>35</sup> Wheatley claims that both men put forward the view that Home Rule should be the beginning of a federal process. This suggests that the Round Table's ideas were not so far removed from those of the Home Rulers at this stage, and were prepared to draw on contacts to achieve the federation of the United Kingdom, including Ireland. Both Redmond and O'Connor would also have been influenced by the fact that Cecil Rhodes had offered Parnell money to promote federation as far back as 1888.<sup>36</sup> Rhodes had wanted Irish members to be retained in an imperial parliament as exclusion would persuade the English that Home Rule meant separation, and that the Irish would attempt to set up a republic. He therefore sought a federal system with a view to imperial federation.

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<sup>33</sup> Michael Wheatley, 'John Redmond and Federalism in 1910' in *Irish Historical Studies* xxxii, no. 127, (May, 2001).

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Michael Wheatley, 'John Redmond and Federalism in 1910', p. 351.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 355.

<sup>36</sup> R. Barry O'Brien, *The Life of Charles Stewart Parnell 1846-1891 Volume II* (London, 1898) p. 185.

Rhodes' interpretation was probably close to Kerr's own view, considering his ultimate vision of imperial federation. Lionel Curtis was also convinced of the interconnection of imperial federation and federation of the United Kingdom. This followed the notion that the Empire could only maintain its strength if British domestic politics were put in order. Yet Kerr was not fully convinced of this argument as he believed that no scheme of federation for the United Kingdom alone that included England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland would have any direct bearing on imperial union. In his view, no matter how many powers were devolved, there would still be duties that a national parliament would have to perform.<sup>37</sup> Hence, for Kerr, 'federalism' was a 'good fighting word' as he believed that if the Round Table could manage to get federalism discussed, then the achievement of imperial union could be the next step. In his view, these were only the early stages of a very long journey and he was fully aware of the difficult task ahead. The party system in Britain made it particularly difficult to consider such a step due to the rigidity of party creeds and alliances. Kerr believed that when it came to Ireland the Unionists would be attracted to the idea of federation as the country would lose its over-representation and Irish members would soon vote Conservative. But the difficulty came in the fact that they could not desert Ulster; Kerr felt that it would take the 1885-95 generation to die out before the Unionists could seriously consider devolution. Furthermore he believed that constitutional change would not fit with the party's ideals as the Unionists were a party of constitutions and strong government. The Liberals, on the other hand, were traditionally a party of social change, anti-capitalism, anti-landlordism and anti-

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<sup>37</sup> Philip Kerr to Lord Henry Schomberg Kerr, 22 Dec 1910 Lothian Papers GD40/17/2/162-3.

privilege.<sup>38</sup> It was therefore the role of the Round Table to use its resources to plough 'the hard soil so as to prepare it to receive our seed later on'.<sup>39</sup>

Kerr was prepared to use a range of contacts to do this. Grey had put him in touch with two individuals who could be of assistance. The first, Bourke Cockran, was an Irish-American and the head of Redmond's committee in the United States. The second was an Anglo-Irish landlord named Moreton Frewen.<sup>40</sup> Frewen was the uncle of both Winston Churchill and Shane Leslie, and was extremely well connected on both sides of the Atlantic. His numerous financial failures and disastrous schemes earned him the nickname 'Mortal Ruin' as he was frequently close to bankruptcy. Although both Kendle and Alfred M. Gollin have written about Frewen in the federal context, Alan Ward is the only historian to have explored his involvement in the Irish federal project in detail.<sup>41</sup> Ward points out that Frewen's chief motive in becoming involved in the federalist plan was less the problem of Irish government than the implications of Lloyd George's budget of 1909. He saw this as an attack on the landed and wealthy. Kerr knew this and explained to Curtis that 'Their great interest is to kill Lloyd Georgism, which they regard as an attack on property, which is certain to cross the Atlantic if it becomes the accepted policy here'.<sup>42</sup>

Frewen sought funds in the United States to support a federal solution to the difficulties facing the United Kingdom. He joined forces with constitutional

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<sup>38</sup> Philip Kerr to Lionel Curtis, 10 Aug 1910, Lothian Papers GD40/17/2/87-89.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> In writing to Lionel Curtis Kerr used the spellings 'Cochran' and 'Frewin'. Historians have consistently used 'Cockran' and 'Frewen'. Works on Frewen include Allen Andrews *The Splendid Pauper* (London, 1968); Anita Leslie *Mr Frewen of England, A Victorian Adventurer* (London, 1966) and Shane Leslie, *Studies in Sublime Failure* (London, 1932). Further detail on Frewen's personality can be found in Anita Leslie's biography of Frewen's daughter, Clare Sheridan, entitled *Cousin Clare: The Tempestuous Career of Clare Sheridan* (London, 1976).

<sup>41</sup> John Kendle, *Ireland and the Federal Solution* (Kingston, 1989); Alfred M. Gollin, *The Observer and J.L. Garvin 1908-1914, A Study in Great Editorship* (London, 1960); Alan Ward 'Frewen's Anglo-American Campaign for Federalism, 1910-21' in *Irish Historical Studies* Vol. 15, No. 59 (March, 1967).

<sup>42</sup> Philip Kerr to Lionel Curtis, 10 Aug 1910, Lothian Papers GD40/17/2/86.



nationalist, William O'Brien, who supported a union of both Catholic and Protestant in Ireland. To this end he became a supporter of federalism as a means to draw both sides closer together.<sup>43</sup> Frewen managed to raise no more than £4000 in the United States and the flow was never sustained. Nevertheless, Kendle writes that much of this was sent to O'Brien to support his activities through his 'All for Ireland League'. In allying himself with O'Brien, Frewen could attempt to split the Home Rulers and strengthen Asquith's hand against Redmond's demands.<sup>44</sup> Ward writes that Frewen spent most of his time trying to secure Cockran's support. Cockran was interested in federalism and also opposed to the Lloyd George budget. Although he did not admit his aims publicly, Frewen believed that he could persuade Cockran to transfer support to O'Brien. Yet Cockran refused to play a role in Irish factional politics and would later support Eamon de Valera. Frewen ultimately failed in his strategy, as he never achieved widespread support in either the United States or the United Kingdom, and his attempts to organise a Federal Union League in 1913 and 1914 failed.<sup>45</sup> His niece, Ruby, married Sir Edward Carson in 1914 and the same year he signed the British Covenant in support of Ulster. Frewen's nephew, Shane Leslie, wrote that 'Moreton worked to split the Irish Party...He intrigued with Carson. He financed William O'Brien. He fought and finessed with Redmond. He was forever trying to get [John] Dillon thrust to the wolves'.<sup>46</sup> Frewen eventually lost all hope of a peaceful solution following the growth of republicanism during the First World War and after. It is interesting, however, that to the Round Table he was potentially a very useful ally in these early attempts to promote federation.

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<sup>43</sup> John Kendle, *Ireland and the Federal Solution*, p. 110.

<sup>44</sup> Alan Ward 'Frewen's Anglo-American Campaign for Federalism, 1910-21', p. 260.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* p. 111.

<sup>46</sup> Shane Leslie, *Studies in Sublime Failure* (London, 1932) p. 285.

Kerr described Cockran and Frewen as 'both rather discredited'; Cockran presumably because he had been the head of John Redmond's committee in the United States, and Frewen due to his 'unsuccessful financial proclivities'.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, he believed that Cockran, in particular, would be a useful ally. He told Curtis that Cockran was:

an extraordinarily clever fellow on constitutional matters. He is a most effective advocate, and was determined to do all he could to bring about federalism in the United Kingdom as a means of solving the Irish problem, in which he has been interested from youth.<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore Cockran could use his experience as a senator in the United States 'to prove that federalism is practicable, answering objections, and expounding its advantages'.<sup>49</sup> Kerr saw the value of maintaining such contacts yet he warned Curtis that 'We can have nothing to do with either of these people, but I propose to keep in touch with them as they have a scheme for starting a federal league to do the preliminary work of preaching'.<sup>50</sup> In some respects this attitude anticipates Kerr's later approach to his contacts while dealing with the Irish question between 1919 and 1921. It will become clear that he did not always accurately assess the value of his informants. This instance nonetheless demonstrates that Kerr placed greater emphasis on setting the groundwork for federalisation.

Kerr would remain as editor of the *Round Table* journal from 1910 until he joined Lloyd George's secretariat in 1916. Between 1911 and 1914, however, it was edited

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<sup>47</sup> Philip Kerr to Lionel Curtis, 10 Aug 1910, Lothian Papers GD40/17/2/86.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

by his colleagues Robert Brand, Edward Grigg and F.S. Oliver as Kerr was ill, suffering with severe depression and exhaustion in a variety of sanatoria and resorts in Europe. As a result there is a significant gap in the archive material during these years. Meanwhile the controversy raged over the third Home Rule Bill and Britain came to the brink of civil war. The Asquith government introduced the Home Rule Bill in April 1912 and Sir Edward Carson, the leader of the Irish Unionists in the House of Commons, pledged to oppose it. He declared that if Ulster was to be driven by force then he could imagine they could use no means too strong in order to prevent it. To this day we do not know for certain whether or not Carson was bluffing, and whether the situation would have come to a head in full blown civil war. All sides were saved by the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 when political leaders closed ranks in support of Britain's war effort. There was, and is, a deeply engrained history of militancy being used to put pressure on the constitutional side in Anglo-Irish relations. It had worked in the case of the Irish Church Act in 1869 and Gladstone's Land Acts had been the result of Fenian pressure. Carson, as a lawyer, was putting pressure on the negotiating side at Westminster, although it seems likely that he would have taken military action had war not broken out in 1914.

The Round Table's role in this crisis has been described in detail by John Kendle, while Gollin has highlighted Milner's support of Ulster.<sup>51</sup> In his biography of Kerr, Billington argues that 'it seems likely he [Kerr] shared the opposition of Lord Milner and the rest of the Moot to Irish autonomy'.<sup>52</sup> Milner, like most Unionists, believed that Irish Home Rule would lead ultimately to separation and the end of the Empire. Furthermore to force Irish Protestants against their will was viewed as an attack on democracy itself. Yet Billington argues that although Kerr was not involved in the

<sup>51</sup> John Kendle, *Ireland and the Federal Solution*, p. 152-176; A.M. Gollin, *Proconsul in Politics: A Study of Lord Milner in Opposition and in Power* (London, 1964) p. 172-222.

<sup>52</sup> David P. Billington, Jr., *Lothian: Philip Kerr and the Quest for World Order*, p. 31.

events of 1912-14, 'the unfolding crisis brought to a head the movement that he had helped to organise and direct'.<sup>53</sup> Lionel Curtis and Edward Grigg urged Winston Churchill to propose a federal solution in a speech on 12 September 1912. This involved dividing the United Kingdom into ten or twelve regional governments, including one for Ulster. The proposal was however attacked by Liberals and Irish Nationalists as a device for excluding Ulster from the United Kingdom and neither took up the idea. Meanwhile F.S. Oliver renewed his own efforts to promote devolution and pressed for a peaceful outcome while fully supporting the Unionist cause. On 20 September Ulster Protestants began to sign a 'Solemn League and Covenant' pledging to resist Home Rule should it be enforced and the paramilitary Ulster Volunteers were formed.

The Round Table were not ready to provoke civil war, but they undoubtedly supported Ulster. To this end, Milner and the members formed a plan to gain signatures in the United Kingdom to demand a referendum on Home Rule. They received mixed support from prominent Unionists. Lord Robert Cecil refused to support the British Covenant arguing that a call to civil war was unnecessary and would be an affront to the rule of law. Austen and Neville Chamberlain also refused their support.<sup>54</sup> The Unionist Party leader Andrew Bonar Law approved of the plan, along with Walter Long. The most enthusiastic Unionist member of the Round Table Moot was Geoffrey Dawson, editor of *The Times*. He endorsed the Covenant and helped to publicise it through the paper. While his colleagues, Curtis and Brand, were shuttling between the two parties arguing the case for federation, Dawson thought that Carson had played his cards exceedingly well.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>55</sup> Norman Rose, *The Cliveden Set, Portrait of an Exclusive Fraternity* (London, 2001) p. 79.

There seem to have been differences in the approach and sentiment of the Round Table group to the Ulster Crisis. Milner, for example, financed the arms that were bought from Germany and landed at Larne in April 1914 for the use of the Ulster Volunteers.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, Curtis's biographer, Deborah Lavin, writes that although he considered signing the Covenant for Ulster in 1912 he later came to believe that the Easter Rebellion of 1916 had been the result of the failure to suppress the organisation of armed force in Ulster in 1912.<sup>57</sup> In 1914 he made a last attempt, along with Edward Grigg and Robert Brand, to put a federal solution in place. Both Churchill and Lloyd George agreed to take the plan to Asquith while Curtis, Grigg and Brand were to approach Bonar Law, Carson and Chamberlain. The Unionist leaders were in agreement, although this may have been a bluff. The Prime Minister, however, turned it down.

Asquith had offered an amending bill before the final vote on Home Rule in the spring of 1914. The bill allowed Ulster to opt out of Home Rule for a period of six years. Carson, however, dismissed this as merely a stay of execution. Meanwhile, Churchill warned that any illegal action in Ulster would be met with force. The military leaders at the Curragh Camp were instructed to prepare for deployment to Northern Ireland and, in response, most of the officers resigned their commissions in the infamous 'Curragh Mutiny'.<sup>58</sup> It is unfortunate that there appears to be no record of Kerr's reaction to this. Lord Ralph Kerr must surely have had contacts from his own time commanding the forces there and presumably he would have had strong opinions about the Ulster crisis. The Home Rule Bill was passed by the Commons 25 May 1914. When the House of Lords altered the amending Bill permanently to

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<sup>56</sup> David P. Billington, Jr., *Lothian: Philip Kerr and the Quest for World Order*, p. 35.

<sup>57</sup> Deborah Lavin, *From Empire to International Commonwealth: A Biography of Lionel Curtis* (Oxford, 1995) p. 182.

<sup>58</sup> For a detailed history of the Curragh incident see A.P. Ryan, *Mutiny at the Curragh* (London, 1956) and James Fergusson, *The Curragh Incident* (London, 1964).

exclude Ulster the King sent for the Liberal, Unionist, Irish Catholic and Protestant leaders. Although they agreed to discuss the permanent exclusion of Ulster they were deadlocked over the area to be excluded. The crisis was effectively averted when war broke out in Europe in August 1914 and all sides pledged their support.

As we have seen, Kerr was completely removed from the crisis of 1912-14 due to ill health. There is no reason to suggest, however, that he would have supported Ulster's actions. He may have tried, like Curtis, to persuade party leaders to implement an immediate federal scheme. But he had warned Curtis in 1910 that Ulster was not ready for federation:

As for the Unionists, I do not believe they could, on their own initiate, touch Federation today. The old guard who fought for Ulster in 1886 and 1893 are still in command; even if they could be persuaded, the party could not adopt Federalism until Tariff Reform was out of the way...The Unionists, therefore, today have their hands tied.<sup>59</sup>

The only reference we have to the crisis in 1914 is in a letter Kerr wrote to Nancy Astor aboard the 'S.S. Persia':

I don't know what to think about politics. I don't like what Reuter tells us of the proceedings of the Die-Hards. I suppose Waldorf still belongs to the gang. I fear he worships courage too much. There's reason and heart in politics as well as pluck, and if Ulster has the first and the last virtues she has not a spark

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<sup>59</sup> Philip Kerr to Lionel Curtis, 30 Sept 1910, Lothian Papers GD40/17/2/151.

of the second. They seem to want civil war now for its own sake and Milner I suspect as a lever to compulsory service.<sup>60</sup>

This observation has not previously been identified and it appears to be the only evidence of Kerr's reflections on the situation. It quite clearly suggests that he did not approve of Ulster's actions and doubted the reasoning behind them. He was an imperialist and believed in the unity of the Empire. As Lloyd George's secretary he would later recognise the need to make provision for Ulster in any Home Rule settlement. But in determining his views in 1912-14 it is not enough simply to place him alongside other members of the Round Table. He, for example, regularly disagreed with Lionel Curtis. Of course we do not know what news Kerr was receiving while he was away and how it was being reported. At sea he would have received only fragments of news or none at all. In early 1912 he had written to Nancy Astor from the ship the S.S. Halsburg commenting that 'I suppose you are all awaiting the Home Rule Bill. I haven't the foggiest notion of what is going on at home, as I have had no letters for a month'.<sup>61</sup>

The biographies by Butler and Billington both explore Kerr's ill health during this period. It is, however, through Kerr's close relationship with Nancy Astor that we can best develop not only an understanding of his absence during these years but also a greater appreciation of him as a person. The letters that he wrote to Nancy are very revealing as she became his close confidante. He was also a good friend of her husband, Waldorf Astor, and would remain on close terms with the couple until his death, even being given the privilege of having his own room in their grand home, Cliveden. The biographies of Nancy Astor are also particularly useful in this regard.

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<sup>60</sup> Philip Kerr to Nancy Astor, 12 March 1914, Nancy Astor Papers MS1416/1/4/47.

<sup>61</sup> Philip Kerr to Nancy Astor, 2 Jan 1912, Nancy Astor Papers MS1416/1/4/45.



The classic works include Christopher Sykes' *Nancy: the Life of Lady Astor* and John Grigg's *Nancy Astor*.<sup>62</sup> Sykes refers to the fact that years of overwork in South Africa had caused Kerr, like Robert Brand, to suffer permanent ill health.<sup>63</sup> Brand had a weak heart in any case and his workload in South Africa presumably would have taken a further toll. It is certainly true that Kerr's letters to his family during his South African years suggest that he was greatly overworked and when he did have holidays they were short and long overdue. According to Sykes, he became prone to nervous prostration, accompanied by minor physical disorders, which affected his mind. Despite this poor state of health, Kerr had thrown himself immediately into exhausting work for the Round Table on his return from South Africa, touring Canada and the United States for research purposes while editing the *Round Table* journal and contributing articles on imperial affairs.

In the summer of 1911 Kerr underwent an operation on his nose. According to Butler, this was meant to relieve him from deafness, chronic colds and nervous disability.<sup>64</sup> Not long after this trauma, he embarked on another lengthy tour in order to collect material for an article on Europe. Immediately after this he left for a more extensive tour of the Near East and Asia, returning through Canada and the United States, and finally arriving back in England at the end of August 1912.<sup>65</sup> Kerr spent two and a half months of this tour in India, explaining why the Round Table papers in the Lothian collection for these years contain mainly volumes on Indian affairs.

While in India Kerr wrote to Brand reporting that 'Here I am in a state of complete mental coma...I suppose it's what they call brain fag – coming out of the stress of the

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<sup>62</sup> Christopher Sykes, *Nancy, The Life of Lady Astor* (New York, 1972); John Grigg, *Nancy Astor* (Feltham, 1982).

<sup>63</sup> Christopher Sykes, *Nancy, The Life of Lady Astor*, p. 122.

<sup>64</sup> J.R.M. Butler, *Lord Lothian* (London, 1960) p. 49.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

last few weeks'.<sup>66</sup> Kerr visited a nerve specialist in New York who diagnosed his nervous system as being in a state of chronic over-tension which was, in turn, upsetting his physical system. He subsequently spent five weeks in 'Doctor Dapper's' sanatorium at Bad Kissingen, Germany.<sup>67</sup> Yet Kerr was not always completely detached from his Round Table colleagues during his illness. In January 1912 Curtis went to stay with Kerr at his family home at Woodburn, Dalkeith, while the latter was convalescing from a period of 'overexcitement of the nerves'.<sup>68</sup> Kerr wrote to Nancy saying 'Lionel is here – bored to death, I'm afraid – for I won't talk politics and Empire and he is bubbling over with both. I'm taking him to indoctrinate Rosebery today and A.J.B. [A.J. Balfour] tomorrow'.<sup>69</sup> Although Rosebery and Balfour were politically 'dead' by this time, Kerr tried to use his family's position to assist Curtis in gaining contacts for the Round Table movement.

Other than overwork, Both Butler and Sykes have pointed to the fact that there were additional factors affecting Kerr's health during this time. His religious beliefs have already been discussed at length in Chapter 2. It was during these early years of the Round Table that he suffered a crisis of faith. He had also fallen in love with the daughter of an Anglican aristocratic family, Lady Beatrice Cecil, soon after his return from South Africa.<sup>70</sup> This in itself meant a crisis of religion, as a marriage to a Roman Catholic would have been viewed as a calamity of a sacrilegious kind for such an Anglican family, or indeed it might have meant compromising Kerr's own faith and alienating his family in the process.<sup>71</sup> It seems that he turned to Nancy Astor for counsel and consolation. Indeed the letters that he wrote to her in late 1911 show him

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>68</sup> Philip Kerr to Nancy Astor, 2 Jan 1912, Nancy Astor Papers MS1416/1/4/45.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Lady Beatrice Cecil was the daughter of the Fourth Marquess of Salisbury.

<sup>71</sup> Christopher Sykes, *Nancy* p. 128.

pouring out his heart, saying that only she and Lionel Curtis knew of the situation.<sup>72</sup>

Following his return to England in August 1912 the relationship with Cecil ended. The distress of this only heightened the poor state of his health. It would be almost another two years before he was in a fit enough state to return to work.

In January 1913 Kerr accompanied the Astors to St. Moritz for a period of extended rest on the recommendation of Sir Bertrand Dawson, later in the year travelling to India, also on Dawson's advice, in order to avoid the harsh English winter.<sup>73</sup> He did not return until March 1914 and it seems that he was no better; if anything he was worse. Sykes has recounted how, while staying with the Astors in April, Kerr became violently ill, experiencing excruciating internal pain; he was suffering with acute appendicitis. The doctors found that an immediate operation was needed and, as Sykes has noted, appendix operations were a fairly recent innovation at that time and the danger of death in such a case was high. Following a successful procedure, Kerr remained at the Astors' home for the duration of his convalescence. It was during this time that he read *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy. From 1914 onwards he would become more and more convinced by Christian Science and a follower of its teachings.

While recuperating from his operation *The Times* printed a piece entitled 'Parnell's Love Story', referring to the Irish leader's relationship with Katherine O'Shea.<sup>74</sup> The article was accompanied by the serialisation of the book written by O'Shea, Parnell's widow, with extracts of his love letters to her. *The Times* had been a bitter enemy of Parnell in his day. Kerr wrote to Nancy Astor asking 'Did you read Parnell's letters in the Times today? He must have been an extraordinary man and she an

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<sup>72</sup> Philip Kerr to Nancy Astor, 8 Dec 1911, Nancy Astor Papers MS1416/1/4/45.

<sup>73</sup> Dawson was also physician to the King.

<sup>74</sup> 'Parnell's Love Story' in *The Times*, 19 May 1914, p. 6.

extraordinary beast.<sup>75</sup> Although he was not complimentary towards O'Shea, he appears to have admired Parnell, commenting that there was 'a fine courage about him'. He ended by noting that he would like to read a good life of Parnell but there was not one. This in fact reveals a great deal about Kerr. An excellent biography of Parnell did exist in Richard Barry O'Brien's *The Life of Charles Stewart Parnell 1846-1891*.<sup>76</sup> Kerr would have almost certainly have known about it as O'Brien was a journalist and author who published extensively. There are two possible reasons why he thought a 'good life of Parnell' was not available. Either he thought that an Irish 'peasant' could not write a good biography, or he may have wanted to read more about the divorce scandal. O'Brien omitted any discussion of Parnell's private life. Either way, this suggests that Kerr appreciated the romance surrounding such passionate political figures.

Kerr returned to work in the autumn of 1914 and became preoccupied with editing the *Round Table* as a vital part of the war effort. For the remainder of 1914, and throughout 1915, the full attention of its members would be focused on the conflict. Kerr's brother, David, had joined the Royal Scots and was killed in action in October. A grieving Kerr was determined that David's death should not have been in vain and focused his attention on convincing the *Round Table* readers that the Empire had to defeat the German threat. It was not until 1916 that Ireland would once more become the centre of attention. Kerr analysed the events that took place there in an article written for his journal and therefore we have a very clear idea of his thoughts on Ireland and the history of the Anglo-Irish relationship written only months before his appointment to Lloyd George's secretariat.

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<sup>75</sup> Philip Kerr to Nancy Astor, 19 May 1914, Nancy Astor Papers MS1416/1/4/47.

<sup>76</sup> R. Barry O'Brien, *The Life of Charles Stewart Parnell 1846-1891* (London, 1898).

As the British forces were facing their worst year of slaughter on the western front in 1916, an event took place in Dublin that would forever change the shape of Irish history and the Irish political scene. On 23 April, Easter Sunday, about 1,000 volunteers, and just over 200 members of the Irish Volunteers and Citizen Army, seized the General Post Office and other sites in Dublin. A proclamation was read in the name of the Provisional Government of the Irish Republic and fighting continued with crown forces until 29 April with much devastation brought to the city centre. Supporting actions also took place in Wexford, Galway and County Dublin, and an attempted mobilisation occurred in Cork. In Dublin, 64 insurgents were killed, along with 132 crown forces and around 230 civilians. The government's harsh reaction to the rebellion has been blamed for the sympathy that the rebels received, and indeed continue to receive, as they gained martyr status following the rising. The Easter Rising has been covered extensively by historians and the mythology surrounding the rebels has continued to capture the imagination of subsequent generations.<sup>77</sup> What is relevant to this study, and is largely uncovered ground, is Kerr's reaction to this episode.

Following the rising Kerr made a trip to Ireland in June 1916 in order to research the article he was to write for the September edition of the *Round Table*. This visit does not appear to have been well documented by his biographers. Kerr stayed with Sir Horace Plunkett at his home near Dublin and while there he also met George W. Russell. As previously discussed, he had read works by both men during his time in South Africa, and would later correspond with both on Irish affairs while acting as Lloyd George's secretary. It is possible to get a sense of Kerr's views on Ireland at this time from the letters that he wrote to Nancy Astor and to his mother while staying

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<sup>77</sup> Most notably by Charles Townshend in his work *Easter 1916: The Irish Rebellion* (London, 2006).

with Plunkett. He seems to have approached the situation in a very detached way and certainly did not feel passionate about the position in Ireland. Kerr described going into Dublin to look at the aftermath of the rising. In a letter to Astor he noted that 'Sackville Street is certainly pretty bad – whole blocks blown up or burned down. Then I came back to lunch and played golf with Sir Horace'.<sup>78</sup>

As the rising took place two months earlier, it is possible that his initial reaction on hearing of it may have been quite different to the attitude that comes across in these letters written from Ireland. In June the state of hysteria that would have taken hold only months before had evaporated. Kerr nevertheless observed that Ireland was greatly troubled and he believed that it was mostly hatred that was at the bottom of the trouble: everyone seemed to hate somebody else.<sup>79</sup> Following the rising, Prime Minister Asquith had commissioned Lloyd George to negotiate with the Irish parties and attempt to strike a deal on the basis of a six-county exclusion of Ulster.<sup>80</sup> In a later letter to Nancy, Kerr explained that everybody was opposed to Lloyd George's proposals and he could not see how they could be carried. He opined that 'I think they are bad in themselves, and only tolerable as the stepping stone to eventual unity. But it does not look as if they could even be that'.<sup>81</sup> What is particularly interesting here is the fact that Lloyd George's proposals were not so far removed from the proposals of the Government of Ireland Bill that Kerr would work on in 1919-20. Indeed, he would spend the years 1919-21 defending the Government of Ireland Bill as the best possible solution that the government could offer under the circumstances, and hoped that the proposals would indeed lead to eventual unity.

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<sup>78</sup> Philip Kerr to Nancy Astor, 11 June 1916, Nancy Astor Papers MS1416/1/4/49.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule, An Irish History 1800-2000*, p. 180.

<sup>81</sup> Philip Kerr to Nancy Astor, 15 June 1916, Nancy Astor Papers MS1416/1/4/49.

Like many at the time Kerr appears to have found the Irish situation confusing and believed that it was no use writing about it as ultimately it would do no good.<sup>82</sup>

Corresponding with his mother, he explained that 'Ireland is a difficult place to get hold of. I'm not much wiser now than when I arrived, only slightly more confused. I don't know whether I shall be able to write anything useful'.<sup>83</sup> He went further in another letter a few days later, stating 'Fortunately it's Ireland's relations to the outside world with which I'm concerned. I should never get to understand the devious workings of the Irish mind, so far as its internal politics are concerned'.<sup>84</sup>

This goes some way to explaining Kerr's stance in 1916. His primary concern was with Ireland's place in relation to the British Empire. He had no real interest in trying to understand its internal politics. He does not appear to have been anti-Irish, just somewhat detached from Irish domestic affairs. This may have been rooted in his father's earlier position there, effectively policing the country through his role at the Curragh Camp. Nevertheless, Kerr described Ireland as a lovely country and felt that it had been good for him to get out of 'the war laden atmosphere of London' as Ireland seemed to be hardly concerned with the war.<sup>85</sup> He had also enjoyed the company of George W. Russell (Æ) while staying at the home of Plunkett, describing him as a 'delightful creature – with a most loving heart'.<sup>86</sup> This trip certainly assisted him in making connections with figures such as Plunkett and Russell who were located within the Irish political spectrum. He would be able to draw on these contacts while subsequently working for Lloyd George at Downing Street.

One final point of interest relating to Kerr's trip to Dublin involves his visit to a Christian Science church during his stay. Before leaving for Ireland he wrote to

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Philip Kerr to Lady Anne Kerr, 13 June 1916, Lothian Papers GD40/17/465/31.

<sup>84</sup> Philip Kerr to Lady Anne Kerr, 16 June 1916, Lothian Papers GD40/17/465/32.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Philip Kerr to Nancy Astor, 11 June 1916, Nancy Astor Papers MS1416/1/4/49.



Nancy Astor saying that he wanted to meet more Christian Scientists and that he would try to do so in Dublin as there was such a church there. He added that it would be interesting to find out what the local Christian Science view of the rebellion was.<sup>87</sup> It is disappointing that there is no record of whether Kerr actually did discover this as it would have added a fascinating dimension to our understanding of his own views and of the various Irish reactions to the rebellion. He did however respond very positively to the Christian Scientists he met, commenting that they were 'very friendly and kind'.<sup>88</sup> Considering his reactions to these people it is perhaps possible to suggest that he was not so much anti-Irish but unsympathetic towards Irish-Catholics. He certainly admired figures such as Parnell and responded favourably to individuals such as Russell. It can be contended that his more negative comments, such as 'the devious workings of the Irish mind', were directed more towards the Catholic masses or the nationalist agitation in general. This will be explored further in Chapter 7. Following his visit to Dublin Kerr went to Belfast in order to compare reactions to the Easter Rising there. It is unfortunate that there are no letters describing his findings or impressions of people in the north.

Despite his confusion regarding the Irish situation, Kerr tried to make some sense of the rising in his article and to put the events into perspective.<sup>89</sup> It was printed in the September edition of the *Round Table* and essentially aimed to place the rebellion within the context of Anglo-Irish history. Kerr suggested that initially people were shocked by the rising but, with no coherent narrative of its significance, attention quickly returned to the war. British and Irish troops were being slaughtered on the Western Front in 1916 and many Irish families had fathers, sons and brothers involved in the fighting. As a result, there was not a great deal of sympathy for the

<sup>87</sup> Philip Kerr to Nancy Astor, 9 June 1916, Nancy Astor Papers MS1416/1/4/49.

<sup>88</sup> Philip Kerr to Nancy Astor, 11 June 1916, Nancy Astor Papers MS1416/1/4/49.

<sup>89</sup> [Philip Kerr] 'Ireland and the Empire', in *The Round Table* No. 24 (September, 1916).

rebels or any real understanding of their motives. Kerr admitted that it was the government's policy that turned public attention back to events in Ireland and sparked sympathy for the insurgents. He wrote that it was the 'steady trickle of executions' in the aftermath that had caused 'a violent revulsion of feeling...as it appeared that the British government was taking revenge for a political rising of no great importance'.<sup>90</sup> Kerr briefly mentioned Lloyd George's failed attempt to negotiate a deal and argued that there was much in the previous months that had been 'obscure' and 'much that has revived passions too long fed on memories of a tragic past'. He intended to tell the story 'accurately' and 'in perspective'. In so doing his intention was to 'recall attention to the permanent and unchangeable facts which must govern a settlement'.<sup>91</sup>

Following his trip to Dublin, Kerr had come to realise that the rebellion was multi-layered and not simply the result of surface tensions. He recognised that there were obscurities in the events themselves and misunderstandings on both sides that were deeply rooted in the history of the islands. This may have reflected the opinions of Plunkett and Russell. Kerr argued that unless these misunderstandings were removed then hostilities would be continuously renewed. He thus attempted to bring perspective to the events of the past by examining the history of the relationship between the two islands. Two main points arose from his analysis and were, in his opinion, the root causes of tensions. The first was the fact that Britain and Ireland were inseparably interrelated. He insisted that the very basic fact of geography meant that this was unavoidable. Secondly he argued that the Irish were far behind Britain in terms of civilisation. His account here is perhaps somewhat patronising. There is evidence to suggest that Kerr did not consider the Irish as equals and believed in

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 614.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 615.

national stereotypes. In a letter to F.S. Oliver in 1915 he gave a less than complimentary description of a man named Sheridan, who he described as:

an Irishman and has the characteristic qualities of an Irishman. He is rather lacking in responsibility I should say, but is a decent fellow on the whole. He is of no importance politically in the Transvaal nor is he ever likely to become so.<sup>92</sup>

Kerr blamed Ireland's 'backward condition' on the failure of earlier conquests by the Normans, and subsequent rulers, to establish proper government in Ireland. He wrote that Henry II had difficulty establishing England and Ireland as one kingdom due to the tribal system in the latter country. This may have reflected the thought of Lionel Curtis, as Kerr quoted from his *Commonwealth of Nations* when defining tribalism:

The tribe is an embryonic state limited by the fact that its essential bond of blood relation arrests its development at the point beyond which its members cease to be sensible of their kinship.<sup>93</sup>

Although he maintained that the kings of England had done the right thing in unifying the two kingdoms in Tudor times, Kerr was nevertheless sympathetic to the subsequent plight of the Irish people. Describing the Protestant plantations under Cromwell and the penal laws of the eighteenth century, and possibly with his own Catholic heritage in mind, he wrote that:

<sup>92</sup> Philip Kerr to Frederick Scott Oliver, 6 Sept 1915, Frederick Scott Oliver Papers MS 24852 / 23.

<sup>93</sup> Lionel Curtis in *The Commonwealth of Nations* quoted in [Philip Kerr] 'Ireland and the Empire' in *The Round Table* No. 24 (September, 1916) p. 619.

Ireland passed through a vale of tears to a condition in which her people were artificially depressed by a strong government in the interests of Protestantism and of the Protestant minority.<sup>94</sup>

Despite this Kerr defended the actions of William Pitt following the rebellion of 1798, asserting that the Act of Union was the only course to adopt. He stated that the ideal of separation was not only suicidal but impossible because:

if the British people are still to be responsible for the unity, good government and safety of the Empire as a whole, they can never allow that Irish harbours and ports should be liable to be used as the bases for foreign fleets.<sup>95</sup>

This would be a factor that would concern Kerr for the remainder of his career.

During 1919-21 he would be emphatic in stating that for security purposes Britain could never allow Ireland control of her own defence. He would insist that no matter what deal was struck Britain must be allowed to maintain military bases in Ireland. With this proviso, he argued that the union had two key merits: the first that it made Catholic emancipation possible, and the second that it ensured Ireland was no longer a dependency and came to occupy the same status as England, Scotland or Wales.

In discussing the history of the Home Rule movement Kerr recognised that the union had failed to undermine 'the persistent consciousness in the Irish majority that they are a separate nationality'.<sup>96</sup> He did not provide a detailed history of the so-called 'persistent consciousness'; rather he explained that up until 1870 this had been

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<sup>94</sup> [Philip Kerr] 'Ireland and the Empire', p. 621.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 622.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 625.

concerned with the repeal of the union, and from 1870 'nationalism solidified into its present shape of the demand for Home Rule'. This is of course a very simplistic view. Kerr explained however that the movement was not an attempt to reverse the union settlement. Instead he saw it as the acceptance that the common affairs of the United Kingdom should be handled by a common parliament, and a demand for a separate Irish parliament to handle national affairs. Not surprisingly Kerr defined this as fundamentally 'the principle of federation'. He refrained from apportioning blame for the 1912-14 Ulster crisis, although he did emphasise his belief that a minority never has the right to resist the law in a democratic system. Instead he attacked the abolition of the Lords' veto and appeared to blame this for Ulster's situation. This is the only explicit evidence we have of Kerr's thought regarding the Third Home Rule Bill crisis. Although he sympathised with Ulster he was opposed to the threat of civil war. His point with regard to the Lords' veto may have been with his own family in mind: both the Marquess of Lothian and the Duke of Norfolk would have had the right to sit in the Lords as peers of the realm. Yet he argued that there was a need for an independent separate chamber constituted on different principles from the lower house and that a written constitution could only be altered by a special procedure with direct reference to the electorate. Ultimately, he blamed the 'defects' of the constitution for the gravity of the crisis and recognised that the position had only narrowly been saved by the outbreak of war in Europe.

Kerr began his section entitled 'The Sinn Féin Rebellion' by contrasting his praise for John Redmond's support for the war with the 'elements in Ireland that were blind to these larger hopes'. He divided these elements into three groups, starting with the 'Sinn Feiners'. Kerr presented Sinn Féin as a product of the Gaelic League. Plunkett's influence was evident when he wrote 'of which [the Gaelic League] the

most remarkable fruit has been the co-operative movement and the Irish Agricultural Organisation society'.<sup>97</sup> He presented Sinn Féin as an insignificant force before the war, originally 'a protest against the continuous intriguing about Irish affairs at Westminster, and the continuous financing of Irish politics from America'.<sup>98</sup> Kerr blamed the Irish Volunteers for the militarization of the organisation, although he contended that the name, 'Ourselves Alone', demonstrated a failure to grasp the fundamentals of the Irish problem and a predisposition to methods of violence. Kerr pointed out that the Volunteers were originally formed in response to Ulster's reaction to the Home Rule Bill in 1912. This was in line with Lionel Curtis' argument that the Easter Rebellion was the result of the government's failure to suppress Ulster militarism. However, he accused Sinn Féin of being forgetful of Ulster and by the fact that a Home Rule Act was on the statute book. Again, this anticipates the attitude that Kerr would adopt in 1919-21 as Sinn Féin grew in strength.

Kerr devoted little space to the second group he defined – the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB). He described the group as the descendants of the Fenians and a very small band, almost entirely animated by a passionate hatred of England. The IRB, he explained, probably formed a link between Germany and the revolutionaries and provided a channel for the organisation and arming of the Volunteers from German and Irish-American sources. Although Kerr was writing only a few months after the rising, when information was still unclear, his research appears to have been thorough.

The third 'element' in the rising, and the one that troubled Kerr the most, was the Citizen Army under James Connolly. The reason for this was Connolly's socialism.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 634.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> For an assessment of Connolly's socialism see Paul Bew 'James Connolly and Irish Socialism' in Ciaran Brady (ed), *Worst of the Game, Losers in Irish History* (Dublin, 1989).

Kerr argued that it was the most important element of all because it was 'concerned with a social and economic rather than a political revolution'.<sup>100</sup> He was careful to point out that 'Its genesis was not political idealism but, revolt at a state of affairs in the Dublin slums'.<sup>101</sup> He referred to Connolly's goal, and that of the Citizen Army, as mainly a syndicalist revolution. He would say more about his opposition to socialism during his later career, but it is interesting to note his reaction to it in relation to the rising. Butler writes that 'Highly as he venerated the state as the guardian of peace and justice...he dreaded its effect on individual initiative and enterprise should it proceed to own and manage industrial concerns'.<sup>102</sup> In the aftermath of the war, Kerr would be particularly alarmed by the Bolshevik revolution in Russia.

We should remember that Kerr's brother had been killed in the war and he fiercely defended its conduct. He would thus have viewed the Easter Rising as a serious distraction from the conflict. The article duly described how the rebels were denounced by Redmond and how the British troops were 'eagerly awaited and joyfully welcomed by the majority of the Dublin people, who fed and assisted them in every way'.<sup>103</sup> Kerr therefore maintained that it was the policy of daily executions and stories of brutality under martial law that generated sympathy for the rebels from the Irish public and horrified the world. Yet, presumably with Connolly in mind, Kerr argued that Ireland had never been so prosperous and that the government's duty was to restore law and order.

Kerr suggested that the anti-English reaction was inevitable in light of the history of 'Irish wrongs' and the executions were viewed as the vengeance of English rulers on those who had dared to challenge their domination. On the other hand, he

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<sup>100</sup> [Philip Kerr] 'Ireland and the Empire', p. 636.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> J.R.M. Butler, *Lord Lothian (Philip Kerr) 1882-1940*, p. 161.

<sup>103</sup> [Philip Kerr] 'Ireland and the Empire', p. 640.



described the English view of the rebels as traitors, not only to the Empire but also to the Allies when a measure of Home Rule was in fact on the statute books. It is possible that Kerr was consciously writing this as a Scotsman, judging by his references to the 'Irish' and the 'English'. No doubt he was aligned with the 'English' point of view, but he seems to have been trying to distance himself. He referred a few 'hotheads' undoing 'the new union which the common heroism of Irishmen, Scotsmen, Welshmen and Englishmen was cementing on the battlefields of Europe'.<sup>104</sup> As for Lloyd George's settlement attempts, he argued that 'What really killed it was the violent hostility in Ireland to the idea of partition'.<sup>105</sup> He believed that negotiations had laid bare the essentials of the situation as it had become clear that Ireland contained 'not one nation, but two' and that the six counties of Ulster could not be coerced.<sup>106</sup>

With hindsight, his analysis of Sinn Féin is particularly interesting. The Sinn Féin rebellion had, Kerr thought, brought the desire for absolute independence out into the open and forced it to show its strength:

That is a great gain, for its strength is more apparent than real, and once the case for separation is argued openly and on its true merits, as it must be argued now between Nationalists and Sinn Feiners, it will fail in the minds of all reasonable men through its own inherent weakness.<sup>107</sup>

Yet his pre-occupation with the socialist side of the rebellion may have contributed to his underestimating the importance of the Sinn Féin element. He cannot be blamed

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<sup>104</sup> [Philip Kerr] 'Ireland and the Empire', p. 644.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 647.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 648.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 649.

for this as it was not the well organised political machine in 1916 that it would later become. As Michael Laffan has argued in his excellent work, people joined Sinn Féin in their tens of thousands because they were attracted by its romantic image, and because their Anglophobia surfaced after the Easter Rising and during the conscription crisis. Indeed, he has described how there was a tendency after the rising for Sinn Féin spokesmen to communicate in terms of spiritual nationalism; using the language of a cult rather than a political party.<sup>108</sup>

Kerr did not come up with a detailed set of proposals to solve the problem. He did conclude that no form of Home Rule by itself could be final as it would involve the retention of Irish members in a legislative dealing with the affairs of Great Britain. This was the same argument used by Cecil Rhodes to Parnell, as explained above. Kerr argued that any Home Rule Act must lead to some form of federation, either for the United Kingdom or for the Empire, stating 'The principle of federation, indeed, is the key to the solution of the problem'. By using the examples of America, Canada and Australia, he strengthened his point, contending that almost every federal constitution in the world was an attempt to get rid of perennial strife by granting separate states or nationalities the control of their own affairs. It would be unfair to argue that Kerr was out of touch because from 1916 onwards there would be a rise in separatist feeling in Ireland. Like many people at the time he could not have foreseen that the rise of Sinn Féin would render a federal solution impossible.

As a result of his years working in South Africa, Philip Kerr had played an integral role in forming the United Kingdom's first organised pressure group for federalism. Although the Round Table's main goal was imperial federation, it became apparent that proposals for a federated United Kingdom could potentially provide a solution to

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<sup>108</sup> Michael Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Féin Party, 1916-1923* (Cambridge, 1999) p. 214-216.

the Irish problem. Kerr's caution suggests that he understood the potential difficulty in converting Unionists. His long-term aim was political education in the hope that a party would eventually take it up. But he and his colleagues could not have predicted the fallout from the Third Home Rule Bill and the subsequent Ulster crisis. Despite Kerr's removal from the political scene at this time, it is likely that he would have argued against coercion of Ulster but at the same time opposed her armed resistance. His visit to Ireland in the aftermath of the 1916 rising, and the article that he subsequently wrote, puts an interesting slant on his later work on an Irish settlement. He seems to have been more concerned by James Connolly's attempt at a social revolution than the rebels associated with the Sinn Féin movement. Possibly as a result of his father's position in Ireland during his childhood, he always maintained the belief that Ireland was, in the final analysis, a member of the British Empire. He came to believe that a federal measure of self-government would pacify what he perceived to be centuries of 'Irish wrongs' by the English government. This is the view he held as he embarked on his new role as secretary to the Prime Minister in December 1916.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Downing Street 1917-1918**

In December 1916 Kerr was appointed to Lloyd George's wartime administration as secretary for the colonies and foreign affairs. He took up his post in early 1917, arguably beginning the most interesting phase of his career. Kerr would work closely with Lloyd George until 1921 and during this period he would take on a variety of roles, including those of advisor, draftsman and the Prime Minister's representative. His work on Irish policy while at Downing Street is the focal point of this study and this chapter aims to explore Kerr's attitude to Ireland as a member of the secretariat during the early years of his service to Lloyd George. The government were still grappling with Irish policy between 1917 and 1918. Lloyd George was a new Prime Minister with a strongly Tory, wartime coalition government. There was constant pressure from Irish Nationalists to implement immediate Home Rule while Unionists strongly opposed the measure. Although Ireland was not one of Kerr's immediate concerns as a member of the Prime Minister's secretariat, he did address the situation through the drafting of memoranda and through his support for extending conscription to Ireland. These will be discussed, along with his relationship with the Prime Minister. Consideration of the years 1917-18 provide an insight into Kerr's attitude to the Irish question before his closer involvement with the issue between 1919 and 1921.

Kerr had experienced a difficult few years prior to 1916, due to his intense work for the Round Table, ill health and personal crisis, as described in Chapter 3.

Following the death of his younger brother, David, in 1914 his desire was to go into the army. Kerr's parents, however, were understandably set against the idea. His colleagues also believed that his service to the Round Table was more important to the war effort. When Kerr was called up following the introduction of conscription in 1916, Lionel Curtis and other Round Table members persuaded the tribunal to exempt him. Although Kerr was uneasy about this, the *Round Table* reached the height of its circulation during his wartime editorship. Kerr's friends and family were however clearly concerned about his desire to enlist. Lord Selborne wrote to Philip's mother in July 1916 explaining that:

we quite understand his position, his natural feelings, and the danger of the misunderstanding of the ignorant...If it is military service and military service only which will satisfy him, then I don't think that Curtis or any of us should continue to stand in his way.<sup>1</sup>

Selborne recognised that editing the *Round Table* was not stretching or satisfying Kerr. He reassured Lady Anne that 'I will do my best to find him some war work at home, worthy of his powers'.<sup>2</sup>

Things fell into place for Kerr when in 1916 Lloyd George became Prime Minister following the fall of the Asquith government, and asked Lord Milner to join his War Cabinet. Milner suggested Kerr to Lloyd George as a possible member of his wartime administration. Kerr's Round Table colleagues would no doubt have been delighted to have one of their own members so close to the political centre. Milner commented to a friend in February 1917 that 'our friend P.K. has a great chance of making

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<sup>1</sup> Selbourne to Lady Anne Kerr, 30 July 1915, quoted in J.R.M. Butler, *Lord Lothian* (London, 1960) p. 61-62.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

himself heard throughout the Empire'.<sup>3</sup> He would indeed potentially have a great influence over the Prime Minister during his years working at Downing Street. Kerr joined Lloyd George's secretariat in January 1917. The secretariat became known as the 'Garden Suburb' in reference to its temporary offices in the Downing Street garden. John Turner explains that the Garden Suburb was to be responsible for maintaining contact between the Prime Minister and the departments of government, and for writing reports on matters of special concern. He defines it as primarily an administrative intelligence department for Lloyd George that was disbanded at the end of the war.<sup>4</sup> Under the original plan Kerr was to be in charge of labour matters. However in a later scheme it was decided that he would deal with foreign and colonial questions.<sup>5</sup> On the establishment of the 'Garden Suburb' in early 1917, *The Times* explained that the secretaries had been enlisted for special work under 'the immediate eye' of the Prime Minister but noted that 'It is not, of course, intended that they should have executive power or that their appointment should affect in any way the position of the regular Civil Service'.<sup>6</sup>

The Garden Suburb was controversial as it was accused of being a 'Fabian-Like Milnerite Penetration' and, in effect, an extension of the Kindergarten that had surrounded Milner in South Africa.<sup>7</sup> Turner argues that this was not the case and, in reality, it was more like a cohort of Welshmen. Regardless, the accusation reveals the concern that contemporaries felt regarding the potential influence that this group

<sup>3</sup> Milner to Sir Hugh Thornton, 3 Feb 1917, Milner Papers Box 19, quoted in John Turner and Michael Dockrill in John Turner (ed.), *The Larger Idea, Lord Lothian and the Problem of National Sovereignty* (London, 1988) p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> John Turner, *Lloyd George's Secretariat* (Cambridge 1980). p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> John Turner, 'The Formation of Lloyd George's "Garden Suburb": "Fabian-Like Milnerite Penetration"?' *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 1. (March 1977), p. 174-5.

<sup>6</sup> 'Completing the Machine' in *The Times* Jan 15 1917, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> John Turner, 'The Formation of Lloyd George's "Garden Suburb": "Fabian-Like Milnerite Penetration"?' *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 1. (March 1977), p. 166-167.

could have over the Prime Minister. Turner quotes H.W. Massingham, writing in *The Nation* in February 1917:

A little body of illuminati, whose residence is in the Prime Minister's garden, and their business to cultivate the Prime Minister's mind... They are rather a class of travelling empirics in Empire, who came in with Lord Milner... Their function is to emerge from their huts in Downing Street, like the competitors in a Chinese examination, with answers to our thousand questions of the Sphinx.<sup>8</sup>

This is a bitter statement and it is obvious that there were objections to this secretariat experiment. In the same article Massingham attacked Kerr, in particular, calling him 'Narcissus...rapidly assimilating the popular ideas of his day, and presenting them to his chief, as it were, in concentrated pellets'.<sup>9</sup> The motive for the personal attack on Kerr can be explained by a number of factors. He was young, aristocratic, attractive and a well-connected individual closely associated with certain ideas about empire. Indeed the Round Table was an elite group of intellectual young men who viewed themselves as crusaders for their cause, hence the association with the myth of 'Camelot'. Aside from his personal attributes and associations, Kerr was also widely regarded as being the closest advisor to Lloyd George, and would subsequently be kept on as the Prime Minister's private secretary when the secretariat disbanded. Thomas Jones, Lloyd George's chief Welsh aide, noted that 'Adams, e.g. he rarely sees, Kerr much oftener, Astor sometimes', suggesting that Kerr did have the

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>9</sup> Alex May, 'Kerr, Philip Henry, Eleventh Marquess of Lothian (1882–1940)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2008.



potential to hold the greatest English (or arguably Scottish) influence over Lloyd George, if indeed that was possible.

Kerr very quickly became absorbed into the social circles connected to Downing Street. He was a member of the Travellers' Club, and the Athenaeum Club, an intellectual harbour closely linked to Lloyd George's associates. Through being part of these networks Kerr would come into regular contact with notable figures associated with Ireland. When working on the Government of Ireland Bill between 1919 and 1920 Kerr for example asked the Protestant Nationalist, and former Redmondite M.P., Stephen Gwynn, to dine with him at the Travellers' Club to discuss Irish affairs.<sup>10</sup> Kerr also spent a good deal of time at Cliveden, the home of the Astors, during this period. This explains the lack of letters written to Nancy Astor while Kerr was at Downing Street. Not only would he see her regularly at weekends, but he also would have seen her husband and his close friend, Waldorf Astor, who also worked for Lloyd George, on a daily basis. The Astors would continue to host grand dinners at Cliveden to which leading politicians, writers and intellectuals of the day would be invited and current affairs discussed and debated. Kerr often invited guests from Westminster. In his diary, Thomas Jones commented on his first impression of Nancy Astor, after having visited Cliveden for the first time:

She is one of the most 'vital' women I have ever met. Kerr had prepared me for a wonderful woman. I can convey no idea of her pervasive personality... You feel she has a golden heart and I can understand what a mothering influence she has been to the young knights of the Round Table.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Philip Kerr to Stephen Gwynn, 31 Dec 1920, Lothian Papers, GD40/17/78/19.

<sup>11</sup> 'T.J.' to his wife Eirene Theodora Jones, 14 Jan 1917 in Keith Middlemas (ed), *Thomas Jones, Whitehall Diary Volume 1, 1916-1925* (London, 1969) p. 21.

But not every guest shared this view. Winston Churchill and Nancy Astor for instance were acrimonious friends, and there were frequent heated conversations during his visits to Cliveden.<sup>12</sup>

Kerr's connection with the Astors, and his regular visits to Cliveden, points to the people that he would have mixed with on a regular basis outside his working hours. Undoubtedly Irish affairs would have been discussed frequently at Cliveden as many of the guests were, or had been, involved with the issue in some way. Edward Carson was one such individual, along with Arthur Balfour. Although Kerr had come into contact with many of these figures before he joined Lloyd George's service, he was now moving in high circles. It is little wonder therefore that his influential and well connected position was noted, and perhaps resented, by some at the time.

As noted above, John Turner has assessed the role of the Garden Suburb, exploring what he describes as 'the curious and neglected world where politics and administration intersect'.<sup>13</sup> Yet he does not fully explore Kerr's involvement with Ireland as a member of this secretariat. This is because most of the work relating to Ireland was carried out by W.A.S. Adams, a former lecturer in political science at Oxford, who had served in the Irish Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction.<sup>14</sup> Like Kerr, Adams was a Scot and initially they held similar views. Although sympathetic to Home Rule Adams was in favour of a federalist solution to the Irish problem. But he differed from Kerr over the proposal to extend wartime conscription to Ireland. Kerr supported the idea, while Adams opposed it. (This will be discussed further below). It is unfortunate that there appears to be no existing correspondence between Kerr and Adams during this period, but this is no doubt

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<sup>12</sup> Norman Rose, *The Cliveden Set, Portrait of an Exclusive Fraternity* (London, 2001) p. 38.

<sup>13</sup> John Turner, *Lloyd George's Secretariat* p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> John Turner and Michael Dockrill in John Turner (ed.), *The Larger Idea, Lord Lothian and the Problem of National Sovereignty* (London, 1988) p. 36.

explained by the fact that they would have been working in close proximity in the purpose-built offices in the Downing Street garden. However it is clear that most of the Irish work was probably carried out by Adams between 1917 and 1918 and so Kerr would have been more in the background at this time in relation to Ireland.

Some brief discussion of Lloyd George and Ireland is necessary before any further exploration of Kerr's work and views. As the literature review demonstrated, the subject has been discussed at length by historians. It is not the purpose therefore to cover the same ground here but to briefly consider Lloyd George's connection with the issue. It would be an understatement to say that the Prime Minister was a major player in Anglo-Irish politics during his premiership. Indeed he was a major player in everything that he was involved in. Historically, he has gained renown as a master diplomatist who could negotiate a deal in the most complicated of situations. Lloyd George had already experienced some direct involvement in the Irish question before he became Prime Minister. Following the Easter Rising of 1916 the then Prime Minister, H.H. Asquith, asked him to negotiate a settlement between the parties concerned. An agreement was reached between John Redmond and Edward Carson whereby Home Rule would be granted to the twenty-six counties of the south, and the remaining six counties in the North East would remain under the administration of Westminster for the time being. Unfortunately, the two Irish leaders had interpreted the partition proposal in different ways, Redmond seeing it as a temporary measure whereas Carson viewed it as permanent.<sup>15</sup> Leading Tories and southern Unionists exploited the confusion to register their own protests and influence the shape of the

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<sup>15</sup> Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule, An Irish History 1800-2000* (London 2004) p. 180.

deal. The bill eventually reflected Tory fears to the extent that Redmond was compelled to turn the offer down.<sup>16</sup>

This could have potentially have been very damaging for Lloyd George. As A.J.P. Taylor noted, 'Lloyd George told Redmond that he had placed his life upon the table and would stand or fall by the agreement come to'. Yet when the proposals were abandoned he did not keep his promise to resign.<sup>17</sup> All of this provides an important context to Lloyd George's later Irish policy as Prime Minister. When he did replace Asquith as premier in December 1916 Lloyd George was certainly not inexperienced in dealing with Ireland; in fact he would have understood more than most the complexities and potential problems associated with reaching an agreement. He would not want to fail again. It would be easy, with the benefit of hindsight, to dismiss the seriousness of this situation for Lloyd George at the time. However the diaries of Frances Stevenson provide an insight into the difficult position in which he found himself in 1916. Although one should be aware that Stevenson was Lloyd George's secretary and mistress, and therefore her accounts are partial, and not always reliable, her diaries provide a valuable insight into his personal struggles with the situation.

Stevenson's observations are interesting in that she did not agree with Lloyd George's decision to stay on when the negotiations failed. She wrote that the Irish were angry with him and that she believed they had reason to be. Although she recorded that 'D. [David] is depressed and worried about the situation' she explained that he now openly supported Asquith in the House of Commons because he thought that the Irish were unreasonable.<sup>18</sup> Stevenson thought that 'it would be a pity if it [his

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> A.J.P. Taylor (ed.), *A Diary by Frances Stevenson* (London, 1971), p. 109.

<sup>18</sup> Frances Stevenson, diary entry 26 July 1916 in A.J.P. Taylor (ed.), *A Diary by Frances Stevenson*, p. 109.

reputation] were spoilt by this wretched Irish business'.<sup>19</sup> She changed her mind, however, when she began to realise that Asquith's supporters were beginning to see Lloyd George, the Secretary of State for War, as a threat. There were interesting Irish overtones to this situation as Sir George Riddell told Stevenson that Lloyd George's opponents would:

stoop to the trick that was played on Parnell if they thought they would get rid of him that way. The divorce in that case was only brought about from political motives, because Parnell's opponents thought that was the way to crush him.<sup>20</sup>

This would undoubtedly have disturbed her given the nature of their personal relationship. All of this eventually convinced Stevenson that Lloyd George had been right in his decision not to resign over Ireland. Indeed if he had done so he would have lost a great deal of his power in being excluded from the Cabinet. Instead, by holding his ground it was Lloyd George who ousted Asquith from the premiership in 1916.

Kerr's relationship with the new Prime Minister is particularly interesting. On joining the secretariat he fell under his spell. Butler writes that he:

profoundly admired Lloyd George's genius – the drive and imagination which he infused into the war effort, his courage and resource, his freedom from

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Frances Stevenson, diary entry 28 July 1916 in A.J.P. Taylor (ed.), *A Diary by Frances Stevenson*, p. 110.

snobbery and his readiness to try novel solutions. He felt also the charm of his Chief's personality.<sup>21</sup>

More importantly, Frank Owen points out that Kerr was reputed to be one of the few outstanding men in British public life who worked with Lloyd George and never quarrelled with him.<sup>22</sup> In her memoirs, Stevenson described Kerr thus:

His sincerity expressed itself in his benign and handsome countenance. He judged no one harshly, and I never saw him ruffled. He responded to L.G.'s tantrums with an amused smile, realising that they were often the result of some annoyance which L.G. had to distribute on someone who happened to be around – not necessarily the person who caused it. He knew, too, that sometimes they were deliberate, in order to gain a point. In fact he knew his chief through and through and he loved and admired him.<sup>23</sup>

Kerr would have been an extremely useful ally for Lloyd George. For those who considered Lloyd George a social inferior, Kerr elevated his status as an aristocratic secretary and advisor. The latter's Unionist background could also have assisted Lloyd George in keeping him in touch with the views of the Tories in the coalition government. Kerr's capacity for hard work would also make him an invaluable aide to the Prime Minister. Although other aides, such as Tom Jones, were important to Lloyd George for different reasons, it is little wonder that the Prime Minister came to rely increasingly on Kerr and entrusted him with matters of importance. Much later, writing to his first wife Margaret Lloyd George in 1920, the Prime Minister expressed

<sup>21</sup> J.R.M. Butler, *Lord Lothian* (London, 1960) p. 66.

<sup>22</sup> Frank Owen, *Tempestuous Journey* (London, 1954) p. 406-7.

<sup>23</sup> Frances Lloyd George, *The Years that are Past* (London, 1967) p. 105.

his frustration at Kerr's sick leave, on the orders of Bertrand Dawson, following a breakdown. He wrote: 'It will be a great loss to me to get on without Kerr. He and I fit in so absolutely in our ideas. I miss him here when there is work to be done'.<sup>24</sup>

It is difficult to determine the precise level of influence that Kerr had over Lloyd George and vice versa. In his diary, Thomas Jones noted that 'Kerr pumps things into him and he seems to agree and then he goes and does the opposite. You hate and love him in turns, as Kerr put it to me today.'<sup>25</sup> Norman Rose has argued that Kerr's influence has sometimes been exaggerated, not least by himself; he notes, however, that it was still considerable. He quotes an incident that was recounted by Arthur Balfour when he had asked Kerr if Lloyd George had read a certain memorandum. Kerr had responded 'I don't think so, but I have', to which Balfour replied 'Not quite the same thing, is it, Philip – yet?'.<sup>26</sup> It can be safely acknowledged that both Kerr and Lloyd George had a high regard for each other and hence in shaping policy there seems to have been little disagreement. It is important to bear in mind, however, that when it came to Ireland they did not always share the same perspective. John Grigg has explained that Lloyd George had a bad conscience about his failure to bring about an Irish settlement in the spring of 1916.<sup>27</sup> It is therefore understandable that he would have proceeded with caution when it came to introducing conscription and furthering attempts to implement the Home Rule Act that was already in place from 1914. Equally, it is understandable that he sought to push ahead with the Irish Convention in 1917-18, although Kerr counselled him not to be too hasty. These factors will be discussed in due course.

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<sup>24</sup> David Lloyd George to Margaret Lloyd George, 2 Sept 1920 in Kenneth O. Morgan (ed.), *Lloyd George Family Letters, 1885-1936* (London, 1973) p. 192.

<sup>25</sup> Diary entry 18 April 1917 in Keith Middlemas (ed.), *Thomas Jones, Whitehall Diary Volume 1, 1916-1925* (London, 1969) p. 31.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted from 'Blanche E.C. Dugdale, *Arthur James Balfour*, 1939, ii, 200' in Norman Rose, *The Cliveden Set, Portrait of an Exclusive Fraternity* (London, 2001) p. 97.

<sup>27</sup> John Grigg, *Lloyd George, War Leader, 1916-1918* (London, 2003) p. 117.



Kerr was thrown into the deep end in January 1917, judging by the correspondence and paperwork that he was dealing with. Although Adams was chiefly responsible for handling Irish matters. Early on in his new administrative role there is evidence of Kerr addressing the Irish question on behalf of the Prime Minister as part of his role of dealing with foreign and colonial issues. In 1917 the Prime Minister of Australia, W.M. Hughes, sent a telegram to Lloyd George regarding the agitation of the Irish in Australia to further Home Rule in Ireland. The Irish Party in Australia proposed to lobby state leaders to express their support for Home Rule in order to help John Redmond drive it forward. Hughes' telegram expressed support for Lloyd George and, although claiming to be sympathetic to Home Rule, informed the Prime Minister that he refused to support the Irish Party in their resolution as his main aim was to follow the latter's lead. Indeed Hughes' attitude was in fact quite similar to that of Kerr. Like Kerr, Hughes was a Catholic and a firm supporter of conscription. His support for conscription has made him a controversial figure in Australian history. Geoffrey Bolton has explained it was the conscription controversy that split the Australian Labour Party, revived sectarianism and divided the Australian public as possibly no issue has before or since.<sup>28</sup>

Kerr drafted a reply to Hughes's telegram for Lloyd George and, in doing so, laid out his vision of the way forward for Ireland. In a letter to Lloyd George dated 13 January 1917 Kerr set out the basis of a settlement in four main points: the Home Rule Act would be brought immediately into force; Ulster would be given the right to contract out for a period of three years; conscription would be introduced to Ireland with immediate effect; and, finally, Home Rule and conscription would be implemented simultaneously. Hence we have a very clear indication of Kerr's view

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<sup>28</sup> Geoffrey Bolton in Michelle Grattan (ed.), *Australian Prime Ministers* (Sydney, 2000). p. 102.

of the Irish situation at this time.<sup>29</sup> Kerr drafted a reply to Hughes, explaining the situation and urging him to persuade the Irish-Australians to put pressure on the Irish leaders to accept any settlement that did not force Ulster into accepting Home Rule.<sup>30</sup> Kerr was now clearly a player in Anglo-Irish politics. Although it was not his primary role in the secretariat, he was certainly involved in the issue behind the scenes.

It was the conscription issue that defined Kerr's position on Ireland in 1917-18. John Turner and Michael Dockrill have explained that his influence became more evident in Irish policy because he supported the Cabinet's decision to extend conscription to Ireland, whereas Adams opposed it. Consequently, Kerr enjoyed Lloyd George's confidence in Irish affairs.<sup>31</sup> In April 1918 the newspaper proprietor, C.P. Scott, went to see the Prime Minister, observing that 'Kerr, on whom he evidently relies on increasingly, was in the room most of the time, but it didn't much matter'.<sup>32</sup> Kerr appears to have been very much in Lloyd George's confidence after only a year in his service. In his diary Scott described discussing the conscription issue with them both. He wrote that '[Lloyd] George started right away by saying he was determined to put Conscription through in Ireland'.<sup>33</sup> The diarist expressed concern that this would ruin any chances of an agreed settlement on Home Rule. Although Lloyd George had been inclined to agree with Scott, he argued that it had become a political necessity if the Tories were to accept Home Rule. The implementation of military conscription was intended to be put through with Home Rule as a parallel measure and part of the same policy. Kerr reportedly agreed with

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<sup>29</sup> Philip Kerr to Lloyd George, 13 Jan 1917, Lloyd George Papers, F/89/1/1.

<sup>30</sup> Lloyd George to W.M. Hughes, 13 Jan 1917, Lloyd George Papers, F/89/1/1.

<sup>31</sup> John Turner and Michael Dockrill in John Turner (ed.), *The Larger Idea, Lord Lothian and the Problem of National Sovereignty* (London, 1988) p. 36.

<sup>32</sup> C.P. Scott Diary, 19-21 April 1918 in Trevor Wilson (ed.), *The Political Diaries of C.P. Scott 1911-1928* (New York, 1970) p. 342.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

the Prime Minister saying 'I am certain that is the only policy. Make the two measures strictly coordinate and force them both through'.<sup>34</sup> Although both Kerr and the Prime Minister acknowledged that enforcing conscription would bring with it rioting and bloodshed, they were determined to counter this quickly, unlike the stream of executions following the Dublin rising in 1916. Kerr stated that 'The executions after the Dublin rising, spread out day after day, a fresh batch every day for breakfast, had been intolerable.'<sup>35</sup> As we saw in Chapter 3, he believed that it was this policy that had gained so much public sympathy for the rebels.

Scott was particularly interested in Ireland as one of the great political issues of the day. Both he and Kerr corresponded during their careers and the latter contributed articles to *The Manchester Guardian*, Scott's newspaper. It is unfortunate, however, that there is no reference to Ireland in their correspondence. Scott only made reference to this in his diary. He wrote that:

Kerr is quite a good Liberal (though an opinionated and rather cranky one), and very much in Lloyd George's confidence, this may be taken to show that he at least believed George to be quite sincere and not, as the Irish suspect, to be playing for a fall and using Conscription as a means of killing Home Rule.<sup>36</sup>

The conscription issue can potentially be viewed as an example of Kerr's influence on Lloyd George. Grigg explains that the Prime Minister had been extremely reluctant to embrace the proposal as he was aware that it was militarily futile and

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 343.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 342.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 343.

politically lethal.<sup>37</sup> He was, however, under pressure from Conservative, military and British labour opinion to bring in Irish conscription, as well as pressure to put forward another immediate Home Rule Bill as a means of appeasing Irish nationalists.<sup>38</sup> It seems likely that Kerr pushed the Prime Minister in this direction, judging from the account in Scott's diary. The fact that Lloyd George, in a typical manner, subsequently played for time on the issue, and the fact that conscription was never enforced, suggests his reluctance. Nevertheless, he put forward the measure in the new manpower bill of 1918. In the meantime, the Prime Minister appointed a Cabinet committee to draw up a new Home Rule Bill for Ireland following the failure of the Irish Convention and the pressure to implement conscription.<sup>39</sup> The committee met for the first time in April 1918, under the chairmanship of Walter Long, who would also chair the Cabinet Committee on Ireland in 1919.<sup>40</sup> Long argued that it was no use trying to placate the Irish Nationalists as they wanted a Bill that would give them dominion status based on the Canadian model. He explained that the Canadian constitution had grown very gradually and that the responsibility of military defence had been taken on in slow stages. Kerr was not part of the committee in 1918; rather it was Adams who was the secretary. He would take on this role at a later stage in 1919.

Dockrill and Turner explain Kerr's attitude to conscription for Ireland in two ways. The first is that he did not believe in the narrow sectional interests of a minority in a time of emergency. In this case he believed the war must take precedence. Secondly they point out that he doubted the sincerity of the Irish resistance movement.<sup>41</sup> Kerr,

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<sup>37</sup> John Grigg, *Lloyd George, War Leader, 1916-1918* p. 466.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 470.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 471.

<sup>40</sup> 'Government of Ireland Amendment Bill Committee 1918' Cabinet Papers CAB/27/47.

<sup>41</sup> John Turner and Michael Dockrill in John Turner (ed.), *The Larger Idea, Lord Lothian and the Problem of National Sovereignty* (London 1988) p. 36.

like Lloyd George, would often refer to Ireland in relation to the American Civil War, as a state that should not be allowed to secede. Lloyd George had explained to Scott that it was the right of Parliament to levy troops as controller of the Crown's armed forces. To deny this right was virtually to claim independence. He had argued that President Lincoln had met with the same problem and dealt with it by force 'and he should not shrink from the same course'.<sup>42</sup> Conscription confirmed Ireland's position as a member of both the United Kingdom and the British Empire. Kerr agreed with this viewpoint. In contrast, Adams did not support the decision to introduce conscription, perhaps because he had spent a considerable amount of time in that country. Conscription 'represented the negation of Redmond's vision of a distinctive and voluntary Irish army' and was unpopular within Ireland; Adams understood the strength of this feeling.<sup>43</sup>

Kerr had a different perspective. As a child, he had seen his father command the Crown forces in Ireland and believed that Ireland should contribute to the war effort as a member of both the United Kingdom and the Empire. His 'draconian' attitude to Ireland appears to have been unpopular with his contemporaries. Kerr had been a member of the 'Romney Street Group', a luncheon group founded in 1917 that brought together leading civil servants, journalists and thinkers to discuss post-war reconstruction. It was claimed by Joseph Thorp that Kerr made an early exit from the group as a result of outraging members 'by his Lincolnian views on conscription for Ireland'.<sup>44</sup> Clearly he was not afraid to make his opinions on Ireland known, even if it caused offence to colleagues.

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<sup>42</sup> C.P. Scott Diary, 19-21 April 1918 in Trevor Wilson (ed.), *The Political Diaries of C.P. Scott 1911-1928* (New York, 1970) p. 343.

<sup>43</sup> Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998 Politics and War* (Oxford, 1999) p. 199-200.

<sup>44</sup> Thorp to Catchpool, Jan 1946, Thomas Jones Papers, Quoted in John Michael Lee, 'The Romney Street Group: Its Origins and Influence - 1916-1922' in *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 2007, p. 123.

Although Kerr's most important work on Ireland was carried out between 1919 and 1921, the Lloyd George and Lothian papers reveal that he drafted speeches for the Prime Minister, and advised him through memoranda on Ireland, especially during the first five months of 1917. It was a delicate situation. The Irish leaders would still have been reeling over the Asquith government's failure to finalise a settlement and Lloyd George's role in that episode. In the meantime, the stalling of negotiations continued to allow the strengthening of Sinn Féin as the Irish Parliamentary Party dwindled. Kerr sensed this and recognised that any major speech that the Prime Minister gave on Ireland had to be carefully thought out. In his notes for the Premier's speech in March 1917 Kerr argued that events were now beyond the point of humouring and gentle pacification :

I think that the most fatal thing that you could do next Wednesday would be to return the ordinary official non-possumus reply. Ireland expects things from the new Government and will listen to anything you have to say. To return an official answer would be to disappoint the hopes that there is now someone at the head of affairs who really cares for Ireland itself and not as an appendage of Great Britain, who is determined that Ireland should be as happy and contented and prosperous as Great Britain, and is anxious for a settlement just as much for Ireland's sake as England's sake. Such an answer would play directly into the hands of Sinn Féin.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Philip Kerr to Lloyd George, 3 March 1917, Lloyd George Papers, F/89/1/3.

Yet Kerr also advised Lloyd George not to be too hasty in proposing a conference on Ireland.<sup>46</sup> He felt that the Irish people were too divided, and feeling was too bitter, for such a forum to work at this time. Kerr explained:

What matters in appointing a convention is putting in the men who can carry an agreement into the country afterwards. In the present disunited condition of Ireland, how are we to find them. A conference at this moment would either fail to agree as it did in 1910 & 1914, or if its members did agree they would fail to carry their proposals as in 1916.<sup>47</sup>

The speech that Lloyd George gave was, in the end, disastrous. He ignored Kerr's advice to present a change of attitude from the old government and instead announced that the view taken by the present government was the same as its two predecessors.<sup>48</sup> As a result, the Irish Nationalists walked out of the House following the debate. The Prime Minister also proposed an immediate convention to bring Irishmen together to discuss the division of opinion. Kerr attempted to limit the damage by sending a memorandum to the Prime Minister advising him on the approach that the government should take, not least that it should not be distracted by the 'theatrical conduct of the Irish'.<sup>49</sup> The advice was that the next move for any settlement would have to come from Ulster, as the government had explicitly stated, that although it was in favour of immediate Home Rule, there would be no coercion of the north. Kerr, therefore suggested that Ulster should accept the invitation to attend the convention in order to discuss the basis of a settlement.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> *The Times*, 8 March 1917, p. 10.

<sup>49</sup> Philip Kerr to Lloyd George, [8] March 1917, Lloyd George Papers, F/89/1/4.



The Irish Convention took place between July 1917 and March 1918. There is a considerable amount of literature on this event, the classic work being *The Irish Convention* by R.B. McDowell.<sup>50</sup> The Lothian Papers suggest, however, that during this period Kerr had less direct involvement with Ireland and concentrated more on foreign affairs. But he did deal with correspondence prior to the convention; in relation to its organisation. Kerr passed on Edward Carson's thoughts to Lloyd George regarding the appointment of a chairman and delegates, and received the report of Lord Monteagle's Irish Conference Committee concerning the possible subdivision of groups at the convention.<sup>51</sup> The Irish land Commissioner, Frederick Wrench, also wrote to Kerr in May 1917 regarding the conference preparations. He was worried that every day that the conference was delayed lessened the chances of its success.<sup>52</sup> Aside from this level of involvement, Kerr did not attend the convention himself and had little formal association with it. Rather, it was his Round Table colleague, F.S. Oliver, who was heavily involved and claimed to be responsible for the convention as a result of his *Pacificus* letters to *The Times*.

As it became clear that the convention would not reach agreement in 1918, Oliver wrote to Kerr in March regarding a federal settlement. He began by observing that 'If you think fit you may show this to the Prime Minister', suggesting that some of the Round Table saw Kerr as their man on the 'inside' and that they could potentially influence the government through him.<sup>53</sup> Turner and Dockrill claim that although Kerr's influence was evident in Lloyd George's war aims speeches of 1917 and early 1918, this does not justify the suggestion that, through him, the Round Table Group

<sup>50</sup> R.B. McDowell, *The Irish Convention 1917-18* (London, 1970).

<sup>51</sup> Philip Kerr to Lloyd George, 24 May 1917, Lloyd George Papers, F/89/1/6. Carson suggested Sir Francis Hopwood as secretary to the Convention, a choice that Adams approved of as he believed Hopwood would be acceptable to Redmond; Monteagle to Philip Kerr, 24 May 1917, Lloyd George Papers, F/91/7/1.

<sup>52</sup> F. Wrench to Philip Kerr, 31 May 1917, Lloyd George Papers, F/91/7/2.

<sup>53</sup> F.S. Oliver to Philip Kerr, Good Friday [31 March] 1918, Lloyd George Papers, F/91/7/3.

had acquired a back-stairs influence over policy.<sup>54</sup> This seems fair, although it appears that Oliver at least tried to establish this avenue. He argued that if the conference failed then the government would have to impose a settlement of its own. Unsurprisingly, he wrote that 'The only possible settlement, in my opinion, is Federation for the United Kingdom'. He argued that it was the only solution for a state with different traditions and temperaments and believed that Carson could make Ulster accept federalism. Oliver also viewed the federal solution as a scheme for the better government of the United Kingdom. He told Kerr that 'There is also a spirit fully prepared for Federalism among the Scots and Welsh'. He counselled him to 'avoid two fatal pitfalls'. Chiefly, Kerr was not to 'let the Government put forward as Federalism proposals which are not Federalism at all, and which would cut the ground from under the feet of Federalism for all time. (Customs, excise, etc. etc.)'. Secondly, Kerr was not to 'let it introduce the element of bargaining by offering a constitutional settlement as a price to be paid for Irish Conscription'.<sup>55</sup>

Oliver agreed with the extension of conscription to Ireland, going so far as to contend that 'It is essential to the future of our race that the glory and self-sacrifice of Ireland should be woven into this war'. He believed, however, that it had to be introduced on its own merits: enforced equally all round as in England, Scotland and Wales, and not as a bargaining tool for Home Rule. He thought that only then should the government make a deliberate announcement of its 'intention to impose a settlement of compromise – a Federal settlement – on the United Kingdom'. As noted above, the government did exactly what Oliver feared through the Military Service Act of 18 April 1918. As Kerr's attention seems to have been elsewhere at this time, we cannot be sure whether or not he advised Lloyd George along the same lines as

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<sup>54</sup> John Turner and Michael Dockrill in John Turner (ed.), *The Larger Idea, Lord Lothian and the Problem of National Sovereignty* (London, 1988) pp. 35-36.

<sup>55</sup> F.S. Oliver to Philip Kerr, Good Friday [31 March] 1918, Lloyd George Papers, F/91/7/3.

Oliver. Although he passed the letter on to the Prime Minister, it is however unlikely that he would have done so. C.P. Scott noted in his diary on 19-21 April 1918 that Kerr supported Lloyd George's decision to implement conscription and Home Rule simultaneously.

Fortunately, we also have Kerr's views on the Irish Convention and conscription laid out in his 1918 article for the *Round Table*, entitled 'The Irish Crisis'. The article is a valuable insight into Kerr's thought at this time.<sup>56</sup> Until 1966 the *Round Table* articles remained anonymous, and it would not have been widely known outside the group that Kerr had written this particular piece. His previous article on Ireland, 'Ireland and the Empire', published in 1916, had been more focused on the history of the two islands, the Easter Rising and Ireland's place within the Empire. In 1918, however, Kerr was in a more informed position to discuss the convention, the conscription controversy and the involvement of the Catholic Church in Ireland.

The convention sat in secret therefore Kerr based his account of the proceedings on the official report. He was not present, so the article simply provided an outline of the position of the main groups and their preferred settlement. Kerr defined these as the 'Moderates' (Nationalist and Unionist) who formed the 'Majority', the Ulster Unionist minority, and the Nationalist minority. He explained that the majority supported the Prime Minister's proposal that Ireland should accept a status within the United Kingdom 'substantially the status of a state within a federation, together with safeguards for minorities'.<sup>57</sup> In contrast, The Ulster Unionist minority stood firm on the existing union, or the exclusion of the six predominantly Ulster counties if Home Rule went through. Meanwhile, the Nationalist minority demanded dominion status. Kerr criticised both minorities for being uncompromising. He argued that 'the line

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<sup>56</sup> [Philip Kerr], 'The Irish Crisis' in *The Round Table* (June, 1918).

<sup>57</sup> [Philip Kerr], 'The Irish Crisis' in *The Round Table* (June, 1918) p. 514.

taken by the majority is the only line which could possibly lead to a final settlement of the Irish Question' as it provided for 'Irish self-government, for Irish unity, and for the unity of the United Kingdom'.<sup>58</sup> Kerr said little about the workings of the convention other than commenting on these irreconcilable differences; rather he focused on the conscription issue that flared up immediately after the conference concluded.

Lloyd George had introduced the Manpower Bill on 9 April 1918. At the same time, he announced the government's intention to submit proposals for Irish self-government to be passed without delay. Kerr explained that 'while the two aspects of this policy...were not dependent one on the other, no active steps would be taken to enforce conscription until the new Home Rule Act had been introduced'.<sup>59</sup> Kerr was clearly angered at the reaction to the Bill in Ireland and commented that:

It evidently came as a complete surprise to a community which had given little thought to the war, was wholly preoccupied with its own problems, and had been deliberately inoculated for months with the wildest tales about the malignant intentions of the English Government towards them.<sup>60</sup>

He described the conference that took place in Ireland between constitutionalists and Sinn Féiners following the announcement, and the fact that they sent a deputation to the Roman Catholic bishops assembled at Maynooth. The bishops had then issued a declaration stating:

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 515.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 516.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 516-17.

The passing of the Conscription Bill by the British House of Commons must be regarded as a declaration of war on the Irish nation. The alternative to accepting it as such is to surrender our liberties and to acknowledge ourselves as slaves.<sup>61</sup>

This was followed by a statement and declaration, issued on 18 April, by the Archbishops and Bishops of Ireland, headed by Cardinal Logue. It denied the right of the British government to enforce conscription on Ireland and declared that ‘we pledge ourselves solemnly to one another to resist conscription by the most effective means at our disposal’.<sup>62</sup> All of this greatly troubled Kerr. He argued that Nationalist Ireland as a whole had adopted the standpoint of the extremists and, secondly, the declarations were proof that ‘the real leadership has been taken by the Irish Roman Catholic clergy’.<sup>63</sup> John Dillon, now leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, united with the separatists in opposing conscription. But when the deputation went to the bishops at Maynooth, it was Eamon de Valera who drafted the statement of resistance quoted above.<sup>64</sup>

The intervention of religious bodies was a theme that would anger Kerr for the duration of his work on Ireland. He would come to believe that religion should be kept completely separate from politics. Kerr’s parents had known Cardinal Logue during their time in Kildare, yet there is no reason to suggest that Kerr had any kind of contact with him, or used his connections, to approach the clergy. He was frustrated by their actions and believed that they had played directly into the hands of Ulster, and the fear of ‘Rome Rule’, as the Roman Catholic majority had shown ‘that its

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 517.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 518.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 519.

<sup>64</sup> David W. Miller, *Church, State and Nation in Ireland 1898-1921* (Dublin, 1973) p. 405.

political life is mainly controlled by its clergy and bishops'. Kerr hoped that the actions of the churchmen were not as serious as they appeared and that they really represented a reaction to:

the somewhat blunt announcement by the Government of its intention to go ahead with conscription, and an imitation of the example of Sir Edward Carson and his Ulstermen in 1914, which will abate their force when the sincerity of the Government has clearly been shown.<sup>65</sup>

This suggests that Kerr did recognise that the Home Rule Bill of 1914 represented an unfulfilled promise, but that nationalist Ireland would yield when reassured of the government's sincerity. Kerr seems to have ignored the fact that the churchmen were themselves politically motivated. Presumably he would have recognised this, despite his practice of Christian Science by 1918.

Nonetheless, for Kerr the conscription issue was a betrayal. Irish Catholics had volunteered to fight in the trenches and yet conscription was opposed. Alvin Jackson has explained that where as public opinion was prepared to accept voluntary enlistment on the advice of democratically elected leaders, it was not prepared to accept coercion by the British government.<sup>66</sup> Kerr wrote scathingly that if self-determination meant 'that every community has a right to think only of itself and to set up on its own regardless of its neighbours whenever it chooses, it is the apotheosis of selfishness and the highway to war'.<sup>67</sup> As we have seen, Kerr's own brother had been killed in action in 1914 and he maintained the need for solidarity if the Allies were to win. He insisted that Ireland must play her part in the war if self-government

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<sup>65</sup> [Philip Kerr], 'The Irish Crisis' in *The Round Table* (June, 1918), p. 520.

<sup>66</sup> Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998 Politics and War* (Oxford, 1999) p. 200.

<sup>67</sup> [Philip Kerr], 'The Irish Crisis' in *The Round Table* (June, 1918) p. 522.

was to follow, showing willingness to 'march shoulder to shoulder with Ulstermen, Englishmen, Scotsmen and Welshmen'.<sup>68</sup> For Kerr, the implementation of Home Rule without conscription would be to grant dominion status to Ireland and, in effect, to allow secession, something that he was strongly opposed to. He argued that it was essential that the government stood firm in enforcing union rights on one hand, while conferring state rights on the other. Meanwhile, Kerr echoed Oliver's sentiments in suggesting that the Irish question could be swallowed up in a United Kingdom federation.

In 1917 and 1918 Kerr began to play a role in Irish affairs within the British government. He was not bereft of insight. He advised Lloyd George that he would have to present himself as a politician that really cared about Ireland, and that an Irish convention would not achieve anything in such an atmosphere of division. But although Kerr proved to be right he failed to see that in implementing Home Rule and conscription simultaneously, in the words of Alvin Jackson, this 'ruined both the credibility of the convention and the residual popularity of Home Rule'.<sup>69</sup> Equally, the conscription issue united the moderate nationalists with the extremists. During the following years he would come to play a more central part in Irish policy making.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 524.

<sup>69</sup> Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998 Politics and War* (Oxford, 1999) p. 215.



## Chapter 5

### The Government of Ireland Bill and the Anglo-Irish War 1919-1921

This chapter, and the following two, form the core of this thesis as they examine Kerr's role in the Irish question during the height of his involvement between 1919 and 1921. It has been established that up until 1918 Kerr's connection with Ireland, and Irish politics, was of a varied nature. He had experienced life in Ireland as a boy, and, as a member of the Round Table he had been part of the debate surrounding federation as a solution to the Irish problem. Kerr had written articles for the *Round Table* journal, discussing the situation in Ireland, and as Lloyd George's secretary, he began to handle Irish affairs on behalf of the British government. His role became clearer between 1919 and 1920 when he was appointed secretary to the Cabinet Committee that devised the Government of Ireland Bill. The resulting Act gave self-government to Ireland and Home Rule to the six, predominantly Protestant, counties of Ulster in the north. The country was partitioned, creating Northern Ireland as we know it today. The Bill was drafted in the wake of the Versailles peace talks, when Lloyd George had become increasingly reliant on Kerr. The context of Versailles will be discussed here, as well as the importance of Kerr's appointment to the Irish Committee. Furthermore, his correspondence with prominent Irish figures, his attitude to the press, and to the increasing violence in Ireland, will be considered in some detail.

It is important firstly to consider the development of the Government of Ireland Act within the context of the ending of the war and the peace talks that followed. These events would have a direct bearing on British Irish policy. When the war came

to an end Lloyd George's secretariat (the 'Garden Suburb') was disbanded and Kerr was the only member to be kept on. He was now the Prime Minister's private secretary. John Turner and Michael Dockrill have noted that during this period Kerr's influence on Lloyd George reached its peak.<sup>1</sup> This was largely due to his role at the peace conference in Paris. He appeared to be indispensable to the Prime Minister during the talks. In *The Kings Depart*, Richard M. Watt writes that Lloyd George's superb personal staff more than compensated for the fact that he himself did not work very hard, and 'displayed his usual penchant for the impulsive and the erratic'.<sup>2</sup> He further explains that:

Waiting in the anteroom was his private secretary, Philip Kerr, a charming, persuasive gentleman with a memory that bordered on total recall. From time to time the Prime Minister would summon Kerr inside, where he could always be depended upon to provide whatever facts were necessary to help Lloyd George through a sticky argument.<sup>3</sup>

Kerr's role soon went beyond merely providing Lloyd George with the necessary 'facts'. The Allies had developed a system of replying to the German notes of observation regarding the draft treaty. In their daily sessions the Council of Four would either approve the Allied reply prepared by the appropriate committee or order it to be redrafted. Watt writes that to speed things up the Council would summon Kerr from an anteroom. After receiving the Council's instructions, he 'would retire to his office and, generally before the Four had completed their meeting, would return

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<sup>1</sup> John Turner and Michael Dockrill 'Philip Kerr at 10 Downing Street, 1916-1921' in John Turner (ed), *The Larger Idea, Lord Lothian and the Problem of National Sovereignty* (London, 1988) p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> Richard M. Watt, *The Kings Depart, The Tragedy of Germany, Versailles and the German Revolution* (London, 1969). p. 55.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

with his draft, which was usually adopted without further discussion'.<sup>4</sup> Kerr's value was such that, following the German counterproposals to the treaty, in May 1919, he drafted the Allied reply. Watt writes:

Kerr, known as perhaps the most rapid diplomatic draftsman in the British delegation – no small distinction among a group whose general level of proficiency in this art was quite high – swiftly produced what amounted to a complete rebuttal to the German note of May 29.<sup>5</sup>

Kerr was thus working at the centre of the international stage in 1919. While attending the talks he would see all of the official correspondence, advise the Prime Minister about significant questions, and occasionally represent Lloyd George on committees. Kerr's influence in the British delegation was further enhanced by the Prime Minister's absence from the talks from 10 February to 7 March 1919, when the former became closely involved with the business of the conference on the latter's behalf.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, in the summer of 1919 Kerr was involved in the drafting of the Treaty of Versailles. He was personally responsible for the drafting of the infamous 'war guilt clause' which forced Germany to accept blame as the aggressor responsible for the outbreak of war. Having drafted the clause, however, Kerr would always believe that Germany was treated harshly under the terms of the treaty.

While Britain was acting out her role as a major player in world politics in 1919, her most troublesome domestic issue reared its head at Versailles. With the help of Irish-American support, Irish nationalists attempted to bring their case for 'self-determination' before the peace conference. This will be dealt with in more detail in

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 419.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 451.

<sup>6</sup> John Turner and Michael Dockrill 'Philip Kerr at 10 Downing Street, 1916-1921', pp. 42-43.

the following chapter. For now it is important to make the connection between Kerr's role at the conference as a member of the British delegation, and the Irish agitation there. Kerr no doubt recognised the threat this posed to Britain's reputation abroad and would partly shape his attitude toward Ireland in the following two years.

Although his role at Versailles has been well documented by his biographers, to date there has been no detailed work on Kerr with the Irish agitation in Paris. His papers do contain a great deal of information on the 'American Commission for Irish Independence', a group that sought to lobby the British government to provide passports for Irish delegates to the peace conference (to be dealt with later). But aside from these documents, the archives reveal little of the Irish problem at Versailles.

The ending of the war witnessed a rise in radical politics across Europe, and Ireland was no exception. Sinn Féin had been a small party before the conflict with little popular support. During the 1918 election, however, it won 73 of the 103 seats contested.<sup>7</sup> In light of this success, a republic was declared by the Sinn Féin leadership and the first meeting of the illegal Dáil Éireann administration took place on 21 January 1919, and with it the beginning of the Anglo-Irish War. From this point onwards violence in Ireland would escalate as the Republican Army, under the leadership of Michael Collins and Cathal Brugha, increased its attacks on policemen and British soldiers. As the 1914 Home Rule Act had been suspended for the duration of the war, and the British government was busy in Paris, the Irish problem was 'on hold' until the peace terms in Europe had been established. The newly formed Dáil seized the opportunity to gain recognition for their cause at the conference. Erskine Childers was chosen as one of the delegates sent by Sinn Féin in the summer of 1919 to press Ireland's case in Paris. Childers was a fascinating, and somewhat enigmatic,

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<sup>7</sup> Leonard Piper, *The Tragedy of Erskine Childers, Dangerous Waters* (London, 2003) p. 193.

character, hence he has enjoyed considerable historical attention. He was an Englishman whose mother was from Irish Protestant stock. Childers was sent to live in Ireland after his father's death in 1876 and developed a great love for the country. Following his schooling in England at Haileybury College, and later Trinity College, Cambridge, he became a staunch imperialist who was anti-Irish Home Rule. He served in the Boer War as a driver, and a lieutenant in the Royal Navy Volunteer reserve during the First World War, and his famous novel, *The Riddle of the Sands*, published in 1903, was a patriotic warning of Germany's potential to invade England. This made Childers's conversion to republicanism, and fierce support for the Irish cause, all the more remarkable.

Childers was first introduced to Michael Collins in 1919 through his cousin, Sinn Féiner, Robert Barton. Collins, in turn, introduced Childers to de Eamon de Valera. Although the Sinn Féin leadership under Arthur Griffith and de Valera treated him with suspicion, they were prepared to make use of his talents and sent him to Paris in 1919. A skilled propagandist, Childers sought to speak with British and other foreign diplomats, and to write articles promoting the Irish cause while in France. As the Minister of Propaganda in the Sinn Féin administration, Childers' contribution would be considered as important as the military struggle in the truce that was called between the British and the Irish in 1921.<sup>8</sup> In light of his role in the Anglo-Irish story, it makes it all the more fascinating that he came into contact with Kerr while in Paris. Kerr's biographers have never made this connection, although Childers's biographer, Andrew Boyle, explains that, through an introductory note from Mrs Sidney Webb, his subject was able to meet members of the British delegation, notably Philip Kerr

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<sup>8</sup> Jim Ring, 'Childers, Robert Erskine (1870-1922)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), online edition Jan 2008.

and Lionel Curtis.<sup>9</sup> In fact Childers had been an acquaintance of Lionel Curtis at Haileybury College and during his time in the City Imperial Volunteers (C.I.V.) in South Africa. Unfortunately, there appears to be no surviving correspondence between Childers and Kerr, during the period concerned. Nevertheless, there was clearly contact between Kerr and the Sinn Féin administration in 1919.

Boyle writes that 'It distressed Childers that "a nice fellow" like Kerr should bring up "all sorts of so-called European parallels where the Conference is splitting off minorities, but had to admit that Bohemia is his only real parallel to Ireland and that they are *including* the German Ulster"'.<sup>10</sup> Here we see Kerr's increasingly world vision of politics. The fact that he referred to a 'German Ulster' suggests that he failed to see Ireland as an exceptional case. As Dockrill and Turner point out, Kerr began to assimilate most of the international and domestic political problems confronting him to a single principle.<sup>11</sup> A letter that he wrote to Edward Lascelles in 1920 confirms this view. Kerr believed that Britain was 'in for a very difficult time all over the world...especially in India'.<sup>12</sup> He hoped that the passing of the 1920 Home Rule Bill for Ireland would make things easier. Kerr argued that the situation was now exactly the same as the struggle in South Africa between the North and the South: 'It is a fight between the self-governing communities for which the American Federation and the British Empire stand'. In December 1920 he was optimistic that the new Home Rule Bill would pacify Ireland and bring with it law and order. In his view, this signified hope for other imperial issues, arguing 'the India problem is fundamentally the same'. Kerr's previous career in South Africa, his membership of

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<sup>9</sup> Andrew Boyle, *The Riddle of Erskine Childers* (London, 1977) p. 252.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 252.

<sup>11</sup> John Turner and Michael Dockrill 'Philip Kerr at 10 Downing Street, 1916-1921', p. 60.

<sup>12</sup> Philip Kerr to Edward Lascelles, 24 Dec 1920, The Lothian Papers GD40/17/214/124.

the Round Table, and his involvement with the peace conference, assisted in the development of these global views.

Although Childers clearly liked Kerr, the latter's views upset him. Nicholas Mansergh has described the 'psychological changes' that had taken place in Ireland between 1910 and 1918. He explains that a shift had taken place in Irish aspirations: the aim was no-longer Home Rule but independence. The Sinn Féin electoral victory and formation of Dáil Éireann demonstrated this, and, as Mansergh points, out Irish nationalism entered an era of military action.<sup>13</sup> All the while the British failed to recognise this and remained under the illusion that the Irish did not want complete separation. Indeed, Boyle writes that Lionel Curtis distressed Childers even more than Kerr as he proved to be 'much more reactionary'.<sup>14</sup> Childers was clearly frustrated that Curtis appeared to regard the Irish problem as merely an intellectual exercise for constitutional experts. He claimed to have 'rarely seen the English...impenetrable egotism in such an insolent, anti-Irish form.'<sup>15</sup>

Towards the end of 1919 Lloyd George had little choice other than to turn his attention towards settling the Irish question. Although, as previously explored, there had been attempts to do so between 1916 and 1918, there was now the added factor of time. As the 1914 Home Rule Act had been suspended for the duration of the war, it would eventually come into being with the ratification of the Peace Treaty with Turkey. The government could therefore either repeal the act, allow it to come into force or replace it with another statute.<sup>16</sup> The first meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Ireland took place on 14 October 1919. It was charged with the task of advising on Irish policy and the drafting of legislation. Kerr was appointed as joint secretary to

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<sup>13</sup> Nicholas Mansergh, *The Unresolved Question: the Anglo-Irish Settlement and its undoing* (London, 1991) pp. 115-118.

<sup>14</sup> Andrew Boyle, *The Riddle of Erskine Childers*, p. 252.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Nicholas Mansergh, *The Unresolved Question*, p. 122.



this committee, along with Captain L.F. Burgis. The Committee was chaired by Walter Long, a keen Tory federalist. Long's role in Irish affairs, including his role in the Government of Ireland Bill, has been explored in detail by John Kendle in his work *Walter Long, Ireland, and the Union, 1905-1920*, and by Richard Murphy in his article 'Walter Long and the Making of the Government of Ireland Act, 1919-20'.<sup>17</sup> As the previous chapter explained, Lloyd George had appointed an earlier Cabinet committee under Long's chairmanship in 1918. This Committee had drafted a Home Rule Bill with a view to implementing Home Rule, along with conscription. The Cabinet, however, had rejected the proposed settlement. Yet the 1918 draft foreshadowed the settlement that would be embodied in the Government of Ireland Act two years later.<sup>18</sup> The Committee proposed:

That there should be two chambers, one for the north and another for the south of Ireland with a common council with certain powers for the whole of Ireland. Such a scheme not to be inconsistent with a Federal System of Government for the United Kingdom.<sup>19</sup>

Murphy describes Long's appointment as Chairman of the 1919 Committee as 'one of Lloyd George's more inspired strokes'.<sup>20</sup> The former was a Wiltshire squire with important Irish connections. His mother's family, the Humes, came from County Wicklow and Long himself had been Chief Secretary for Ireland in 1905. As

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<sup>17</sup> John Kendle, *Walter Long, Ireland, and the Union, 1905-1920* (Montreal, 1992); Richard Murphy, 'Walter Long and the Making of the Government of Ireland Act, 1919-20' *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 97 (May, 1986), pp. 82-96. See also Alvin Jackson, 'Long, Walter Hume, first Viscount Long (1854-1924)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, May 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Murphy, 'Walter Long and the Making of the Government of Ireland Act, 1919-20', p. 82.

<sup>19</sup> *War Cabinet Committee on Ireland*, 15 Oct 1919, Cabinet Papers CAB/27/68.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Murphy, 'Walter Long and the Making of the Government of Ireland Act, 1919-20', p. 83.

the chairman of the Irish Unionists in the House of Commons from 1906 to 1910, his appointment to the Committee would also have reassured the Ulster Unionists led by Sir Edward Carson. Furthermore, both John Kendle and Alvin Jackson have pointed to the significance of Long's appointment within the federal context. Long claimed to be a federal devolutionist because he wanted to preserve the integrity of the United Kingdom. Such considerations, however, were in the background as the government was now under real pressure to deal with Ireland. Despite the Cabinet Committee's references to federal schemes, the suggestions put forward in December 1919 did not touch on a federal settlement.<sup>21</sup> Indeed Jackson has noted that Long's desire to be the architect of a lasting settlement for Ireland far outweighed any debt to the federalist cause.<sup>22</sup>

As a result of Kerr's federal background, historians who have referred to his work on the 1920 Government of Ireland Act have tended to do so within the federal context. Jackson states that, as a Milnerite imperialist and federalist, Kerr sponsored and influenced the deal that was being put together in 1919-1920 and hoped that it would form part of a wider federal reform.<sup>23</sup> Peatling goes into somewhat more detail but, again in light of his imperialist background, explains that Kerr hoped that a moderate nationalist movement would emerge in Ireland to make possible a settlement based on a limited measure of Home Rule. He states that he considered the Act a serious proposal for the better government of Ireland and in the long term would promote political unity.<sup>24</sup>

Kerr's involvement in the Irish settlement is interesting in terms of his imperial and federal background. But, this was not the primary reason for his connection with

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p. 230.

<sup>22</sup> Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule, An Irish History 1800-2000* (London, 2004) p. 228.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> G.K. Peatling, *British Opinion and Irish Self-Government 1865-1925* (Dublin, 2001) p. 154.

the Irish Bill. His Unionist background was an important factor. Despite being a convinced Lloyd George Liberal by 1919, the Lothian Papers reveal that Kerr had always maintained strong Unionist connections in Arthur Balfour; Lloyd George would have hoped that this would give the Ulster Unionists some confidence in the Committee's deliberations. In addition, his Catholic background would have been useful to Lloyd George in appointing him to the Committee. Although Kerr was practising Christian Science by 1919, his Catholic heritage would have appealed to the Irish nationalists and clergy. Furthermore, as we have seen, Kerr had been Lloyd George's right hand man throughout the Versailles Peace Negotiations in 1919, and had developed a reputation internationally as a skilled draftsman. There was no-one better qualified to draft an Irish Bill and in so short a space of time. Unless an alternative measure was put in place the Home Rule Act of 1914 would become law.

Kerr, like all of those who were involved in the Cabinet Committee on Ireland, recognised that the new bill had to respond to the realities of the situation. This meant that the old debates over Home Rule and federal solutions were no longer sufficient. In proposing two parliaments, the government would maintain its promise not to hand Ulster over to the south, while the nationalists could not claim that any part of Ireland was under British domination.<sup>25</sup> The Committee's report stated that 'No nationalists would be retained under British rule. All Irishmen would be self-governing'.<sup>26</sup> As Murphy has pointed out, the council for the whole of Ireland was intended as a symbol of Irish unity that did not exist, but demonstrated that partition was only meant to be a temporary measure. Indeed the majority of the Committee believed that unification had to be the long term goal. With this in view, Long and the other members favoured a nine county partition of the historic province of Ulster. It is

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<sup>25</sup> Richard Murphy, 'Walter Long and the Making of the Government of Ireland Act, 1919-20', p. 84.

<sup>26</sup> War Cabinet, Committee on Ireland, 'Minutes of Meetings', 15 Oct 1919, Cabinet Papers CAB 27/68.

unclear if Kerr also took this view at this stage, although there is no reason to suggest that he did not. Long was fully aware that in proposing such a settlement the supremacy of the Ulster Unionists would be put at risk, as the counties of Tyrone, Fermanagh, Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan all had Roman Catholic majorities. Yet in February 1920, while making amendments to the bill, the Committee decided to recommend the nine county option, hoping that it would lead to the eventual unification of Ireland. The decision was, however, short lived when the sheer force of the resistance by the Ulster Unionist leaders was realised. The Cabinet backed down, preferring instead to have a six-county partition with a strong Unionist majority, which would lead to the Ulster leaders' support for the bill, but in effect ensured a permanent partition.

Lloyd George introduced his proposals to the House of Commons on 23 December 1919. In keeping with the recommendations of the Committee, he set forward the intention to create two parliaments in Ireland, one for the south and one for the north. There would also be a Council of Ireland created in order to promote unity between the two regions.<sup>27</sup> The Government of Ireland Bill passed its second reading in the Commons on 31 March 1920 and, thereafter, Long chaired a subsequent committee to consider amendments. The Bill became law on 23 December 1920.

There is a wealth of literature on the Government of Ireland Bill. Classic works by Francis Costello, Sheila Lawlor, Nicolas Mansergh and John McColgan have all explored the development of the legislation in considerable detail.<sup>28</sup> The historiographical paradox, however, is that they do not explore the role of Kerr. He may have been overlooked because he was the Prime Minister's secretary rather than

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<sup>27</sup> *The Times*, 23 December 1919, p. 15.

<sup>28</sup> Francis Costello, *The Irish Revolution and its Aftermath* (Dublin, 2003); Sheila Lawlor, *Britain and Ireland 1914-23* (Dublin, 1983); <sup>28</sup> Nicholas Mansergh, *The Unresolved Question: the Anglo-Irish Settlement and its undoing* (London, 1991); John McColgan, *British Policy and the Irish Administration 1920-22* (London, 1983).

a Cabinet minister or an individual with a special interest in Ireland. Nevertheless, in his diary in December 1919 Maurice Hankey actually claimed that Kerr had been the driving force behind the proposals for the new Act: 'Philip Kerr was the originator of the general scheme and has piloted it through its preliminary stages'.<sup>29</sup> It is therefore surprising that he should have been so overlooked in the history of self-government for Ireland and especially in the history of partition.

The Government of Ireland Act of 1920 would provide the basis for the government of Northern Ireland until the suspension of Home Rule in 1972. Following the proposals of December 1919, the Committee members were charged with the task of giving effect to the Bill during 1920. It is difficult to determine the precise input of individual members as the minutes and memoranda only briefly state the conclusions of each meeting.<sup>30</sup> Judging from Kerr's own correspondence for this period, however, he was a vital part of the Committee's network system and had access to contacts that would be invaluable in helping to shape the proposals. In fact, it could be argued that he was a binding force behind the scenes, obtaining information, corresponding with significant individuals, and maintaining contact with the Prime Minister throughout the proceedings.

One of the key indicators of his thoughts on the Irish situation during this time was his support for repression of the extreme nationalists under Sinn Féin. Following the announcement by the government in December 1919 that it was to introduce the new Irish Bill, violence in Ireland had increased at an alarming rate. When the government auxiliary forces, nicknamed 'The Black and Tans', were sent into Ireland to assist the regular army and police force in March 1920, the situation escalated to full-scale war as a result of reports of reprisals by the British forces. In October 1920

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<sup>29</sup> Diary entry, 29 Dec 1919, printed in Stephen Roskill, *Hankey, Man of Secrets, Vol. II 1919-1931* (London, 1972) p. 137.

<sup>30</sup> War Cabinet Committee on Ireland, 1919, Cabinet Papers CAB/27/68.

the president of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, Patrick Moylett, was sent to London as the personal envoy of Arthur Griffith. Over a three month period Moylett held secret discussions with the Foreign Office in an attempt to negotiate between Dáil Éireann and the British government.

Accounts of Moylett's meetings with C.J. Phillips of the Foreign Office are in the Lloyd George Papers. Kerr sent them to the Prime Minister immediately before the bill passed through parliament. Kerr's views of the conversations are revealing of his attitude to Sinn Féin during this time. In a letter dated 11 November 1920 he told Phillips that his attitude to Moylett was not harsh enough. He was annoyed by Arthur Griffith's claim that Sinn Féin was winning due to the discredit that reprisals would bring on the British Empire. As an imperialist, this would have touched a nerve. In Kerr's view, reprisals were merely an answer to Sinn Féin's attempt to achieve their goals through murder and assassination. He argued that the latter had paralysed Ireland's sympathisers across the world and would continue to do so while Sinn Féin employed these strategies. Kerr emphasised that only when they stopped using such methods would the government consider negotiating with them. Until then, he stated that the British campaign to defeat Sinn Féin would only intensify.<sup>31</sup>

Here it seems that Kerr did not understand Sinn Féin's hold on the Irish psyche and believed that the movement could be defeated. This 'hold' has been portrayed brilliantly by Michael Laffan. He has described men such as Griffith as publicists, not intellectuals, who were able to convert people through imagery and a formidable propaganda machine.<sup>32</sup> Indeed Phillips disagreed with Kerr, arguing that he wished that he could share Kerr's belief that Sinn Féin sympathisers were paralysed all over the world. On the contrary, he believed that press reports were, as Griffith claimed,

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<sup>31</sup> Philip Kerr to C.J. Phillips, 11 Nov 1920, Lloyd George Papers, F/91/7/11.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Laffan *The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Féin Party, 1916-1923* (Cambridge, 1999) p. 265.

indicating that British reprisals in response to Sinn Féin activity were causing indignation abroad.<sup>33</sup> This suggests a degree of naivety or wishful thinking on Kerr's part.

The attitude of the British press towards the Irish situation in 1920-21 has been explored in depth by D.G. Boyce in his work, *Englishmen and Irish Troubles, British Public Opinion and the Making of Irish Policy*.<sup>34</sup> He has argued that although it is difficult to assess the impact of propaganda on public opinion, the Anglo-Irish War was as much a psychological as a military conflict.<sup>35</sup> This does not appear to have concerned Kerr at all in counselling repression of the militants. He was undoubtedly fully conversant with the power of the press. He had edited the *Round Table* for a number of years and was in regular contact with some of the most powerful newspaper men of his day, including Lord Northcliffe, Waldorf Astor and J.L. Garvin. This suggests that Kerr had faith in the Bill's potential to provide a lasting solution to the Irish problem and he was not prepared to allow the die-hards to interfere in pushing the Bill through parliament.

There is nevertheless some evidence to suggest that Kerr did attempt to limit some of the press damage. This is evident in an account of a conversation between Kerr and C.P. Scott on either the 16 or 17 March 1920. Scott would emerge as a critic of the government's Irish policies and it can be assumed that Kerr tried to win him over as his newspaper, *The Manchester Guardian*, was an influential organ. Kerr had apparently asked to see Scott about the Irish Bill. According to the latter, Kerr:

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<sup>33</sup> C.J. Phillips to Philip Kerr, 12 Nov 1920, Lloyd George Papers, F/91/7/11.

<sup>34</sup> D.G. Boyce, *Englishmen and Irish Troubles, British Public Opinion and the Making of Irish Policy 1918-22* (London, 1972).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.



admitted the defects of the Bill, but said it was the best that could be got out of the existing government. It would at least accomplish two essential things: it would take Ulster out of the Irish question which it had blocked for a generation and it would take Ireland out of English party controversies. There would never be another special Irish Bill.<sup>36</sup>

Although Scott recounted only fragments of the conversation, it is revealing about Kerr's attitude towards the settlement. He clearly did not see the Bill as a great piece of legislation or indeed as a historic federal settlement. In his mind, it was a means to an end. He believed that the Bill was the first step in a gradual process of establishing a new form of governing the country. In another sense, Kerr did have remarkable foresight in as much as the Act would provide the framework for the government of Northern Ireland until 1972, and the 1920 Act would not be repealed until the Good Friday Agreement of 1998.

Only days after Kerr's conversation with Scott, the former sent a memorandum to Lloyd George about the Bill. He was trying to draw up a comparison between the 1914 Home Rule Act and the new 1920 Government of Ireland Bill. Kerr declared that he could not find any body of opinion in either Ireland, or England, which preferred the 1914 Act and that he did not think that there would be any difficulty in establishing that the 1920 Bill was a better, and a more generous, one. He attributed this to the adoption of the two parliament system and to the great increase of taxation across the United Kingdom during the war.<sup>37</sup> He was, however, aware that the six counties' exclusion was controversial, asserting that the Irish nationalist press was howling in a rather meaningless way about partition. Presumably by this he meant

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<sup>36</sup> Trevor Wilson (ed.), *The Political Diaries of C.P. Scott 1911-1928*, p. 382.

<sup>37</sup> Philip Kerr to Lloyd George, 20 March 1920, The Lothian Papers, GD40/17/601/1.

Sinn Féin propaganda, as he stated: 'It clearly has not yet accommodated itself to the fundamental fact that Ulster is going to have Home Rule'.<sup>38</sup> But in Kerr's view this was a fundamental fact and not up for negotiation, therefore the nationalists' backlash was pointless. He believed that the sooner they accepted the idea the sooner things would begin to settle down. In fact, Kerr believed that the best course of action was to push the Bill through as fast as possible. In doing so the policy of Sinn Féin, and of Dominion Home Rule, would become absurd as they could only be achieved through the military conquest of Ulster.

Kerr still held faith in the ability of moderate nationalists, such as Stephen Gwynn, to steer Irish politics in the right direction. He explained that in putting the Bill in place it would provide him and his people with a chance of advancing their policy of 'abandoning factious agitation and violence and working the Bill with the deliberate object of inducing Ulster by reason and conciliation and the use of the machinery of the Council of Ireland to agree to the re-union of Ireland'.<sup>39</sup> Kerr also informed Lloyd George that he had received information from a lady friend, who had been recently mixed up with the younger Sinn Féiners. She had apparently informed Kerr that while the younger people claimed to hate the Bill they in fact hoped that the government would force it on Ireland as they were convinced that Ireland's salvation needed to come through some form of government. The policy of agitation and violence, it was claimed, was not only ruining the Irish character but also leading nowhere.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, based on the advice that he was being given, Kerr had confidence in the Bill's potential to bring about a lasting settlement in Ireland, a settlement that all sides could work with.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

Boyce has explored the reaction to partition in considerable depth. He has explained that, initially, there had been a lack of interest in mainland Britain over the Ulster question due to the violence that was taking place in the south of Ireland. The IRA attacks, and the British reprisals, had turned the press attention away from the Unionists and therefore there were no pressure groups lobbying for, or against, the Ulster cause.<sup>41</sup> The introduction of the Government of Ireland Bill did arouse criticism, however. Critics, such as C.P. Scott, doubted the potential of the Council of Ireland to promote unity between Ulster and the south and argued that to separate the six counties was in fact making the situation more difficult by creating a new obstacle. Journals, such as *The Nation* and *The New Statesman*, also denounced partition, suggesting that there 'would be two Irish provinces, but no Ireland; a Quebec and an Ontario, but no Canada'.<sup>42</sup> The major newspapers, such as *The Daily Mail*, *The Observer* and *The Times*, equally doubted the likelihood of partition leading to eventual unity. Meanwhile, *The Round Table*, perhaps due to Kerr's connection, remained optimistic, reminding readers that in South Africa unity only came about following the withdrawal of the imperial power. It did acknowledge, however, that unless the Bill led to the union of the north and south of Ireland its intention would have failed.<sup>43</sup>

Boyce notes that supporters of the Bill maintained that Irish unity would most readily come about through a process of evolution. He quotes both Lloyd George and Austen Chamberlain.<sup>44</sup> Kerr clearly fell into this category, believing that concessions had to be made to Ulster if there was to be any progress at all in dealing with the problem. In pushing the Bill through, he hoped that it would provide a basis from

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<sup>41</sup> D.G. Boyce, *Englishmen and Irish Troubles, British Public Opinion and the Making of Irish Policy 1918-22*, p. 103.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

which to work and as an alternative to the chaos that then reigned. This was perhaps naïve on Kerr's part as he had been clearly aware of the strength of Ulster resistance to Home Rule in 1912-14. But he may have been led to believe that once Unionists got partition they would be prepared to consider unity at a later stage. Although Kerr had a Unionist background, he was now a convinced Lloyd George Liberal.

David Billington has affirmed that 'Kerr almost to the end saw Ireland through a Round Table lens'; meaning that he believed the Irish problem could be solved through wider United Kingdom devolution. This is not necessarily the case, however, as Kerr was not influenced solely by his Round Table colleagues during this period.<sup>45</sup> Indeed the main key to the development of Kerr's attitude to Ireland from 1917 onwards was in fact Lloyd George. The latter relied increasingly on Kerr from 1919 onwards and he, in turn, was loyal to his chief. Their views tended to be in unison, including those relating to Ireland. Maurice Hankey wrote to Kerr in September 1920, while the Prime Minister's aide was resting from exhaustion due to overwork. Hankey informed Kerr that:

the P. M. is in favour of keeping the two K's in London for the present...Your letter on the subject reached the P.M. in the Rigi. It was almost word for word identical with the views he had been expressing to me on the way up, and he was very bucked. I was rather downed because I had been stating the opposite point of view.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> David P. Billington, Jr., *Lothian, Philip Kerr and the Quest for World Order*, p. 68.

<sup>46</sup> Maurice Hankey to Philip Kerr, 3 Sept 1920 Lothian Papers GD40/17/210/405.

Like the Prime Minister, Kerr agreed with the policy of repression of what he denounced as the 'murder gang' in Ireland.<sup>47</sup> According to Frank Owen, Lloyd George believed that the only alternative to 'official' reprisal was to surrender to the tactics of terror, and to let Sinn Féin have its Republic, which he was not prepared to tolerate.<sup>48</sup> Kerr agreed with this stance, believing that the Government of Ireland Bill would allow for a workable solution and that the Government must not be influenced by the violence.

Yet the other Round Table members were not necessarily in agreement with Kerr's views. In 1921 Lionel Curtis and John Dove (who was then *The Round Table* editor) wrote an article for *The Round Table* following the enactment of the Government of Ireland Bill. They had spent two weeks in Ireland during the spring gathering material for the piece. Curtis's biographer, Deborah Lavin, wrote that the 'two observers left Ireland sickened at the crime and repression'.<sup>49</sup> In an eyewitness account, they described watching a patrol by the British Auxiliaries with the unflattering depiction that 'One felt all of a sudden as if monsters of the pleiocene age had revisited earth to dominate mortals'.<sup>50</sup> They observed that the people's reaction to the patrol was one of contempt, rather than fear. Although the article acknowledged the difficulties faced by the British troops in fighting an unseen force, it condemned the government's policy of repression and the behaviour of the Auxiliaries. The writers pointed out that the nickname, 'Black and Tan', in itself indicated the speed with which the government had deployed the force, even before uniforms could be made for it, and suggested that the people saw the auxiliaries, as 'sub-human' in naming them after a famous pack of hunting hounds. Curtis and Dove

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<sup>47</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity, The Lloyd George Coalition Government 1918-1922* (Oxford, 1979) p. 130; Frank Owen, *Tempestuous Journey* (London, 1954) p. 567.

<sup>48</sup> Frank Owen, *Tempestuous Journey*, p. 567.

<sup>49</sup> Deborah Lavin, *From Empire to Liberal Commonwealth: A Biography of Lionel Curtis*, p. 183.

<sup>50</sup> [Lionel Curtis and John Dove] 'Ireland' in *The Round Table*, no. 11, 1921, p. 491.

concluded that they did not necessarily believe that the government's policy had been to fight terror with terror, but in reality that had been the policy developed in the minds of some officers, whether consciously or otherwise.<sup>51</sup> The article showed no similarity with Kerr's views on the repressive Irish policy.

As for the constitutional settlement, the article acknowledged that the recent Government of Ireland Bill was not designed to be long lasting as it presupposed the union of Ireland under one parliament. Perhaps in reference to Kerr, it pointed out that the authors of the Act would be the first to admit this. The article did not refer to dominion status, but it was everywhere implied.<sup>52</sup> This probably owed much to Curtis's contacts in Ireland, including such Irish moderates as Sir Horace Plunkett, George W. Russell and John Joseph Horgan. Both Plunkett and Russell were in favour of a dominion solution for Ireland, while Horgan, a Cork solicitor, had previously argued the case for Irish self-government within the Commonwealth. The latter would remain closely associated with the Round Table thereafter, in effect becoming the only Irish member. It is possible that Curtis made contact with him through either Stephen Gwynn, who corresponded with Kerr, or through Erskine Childers as Horgan corresponded regularly with both. Curtis and Dove argued that if the present Act was only delaying the inevitable, then there was good reason to put the fullest measure of autonomy in place immediately in order to eliminate the period of friction. There was an element of finality to the dominion plan that did not exist with the recent Act.

Although it has not been recorded, Kerr and Curtis must have been much at odds in their views on Ireland at this time. They had very different perspectives on the situation. Curtis had visited Ireland to witness the state of affairs for himself. He also

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 498.

<sup>52</sup> Deborah Lavin, *From Empire to Liberal Commonwealth: A Biography of Lionel Curtis*, p. 183.

appears to have developed a genuine affection and admiration for the people and for their plight. Indeed he had considered signing the Ulster Covenant in 1912, and yet after his visit to Ireland he argued that the Easter Rebellion had been the result of the failure to suppress the organisation of armed force in Ulster. In contrast, Kerr had been closely involved in the drafting of the 1920 Act and was loyal to his chief, Lloyd George. He was at the very centre of things and hoped that the settlement of 1920 would be given a chance to work.

Kerr's position at the heart of decision making nevertheless led to some lobbying. Plunkett and Russell both appealed to Kerr not only to use his position to try and end the violence in Ireland, but to have their own proposals for a solution considered. As discussed in Chapter 3, Kerr had stayed with Plunkett at his home near Dublin in 1916 while researching an article for the *Round Table*. He had also met Russell there and had taken to him almost immediately. Robert Bernard Davis has explained that the latter was:

Neither Catholic nor Protestant, his inherent spirituality made him respected by many Catholics and Protestants. A nationalist, but not a revolutionary, his sincerity and objectivity in matters of politics caused him to be trusted by all parties and by English statesmen as well. In the terrible days of the Anglo-Irish War he was one of those who pleaded for moderation and sanity.<sup>53</sup>

Given Kerr's own religious struggles and need for spirituality it is appealing to think that he would have been comfortable listening to Russell's views, even if he did not agree with him. There is another reason that Kerr may have been inclined to listen to

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<sup>53</sup> Robert Bernard Davis, *George William Russell ("AE")* (London, 1977).



him. Russell was a northern Protestant and yet, unusually for a Sinn Féin sympathiser, he publicly revered Alan Anderson, Tom Kettle, Willie Redmond and those Irish who had died fighting for the United Kingdom during the war.

Kerr's relationship with Plunkett appears to have been more strained. Whilst the former was in favour of repression in Ireland, the latter was firmly opposed to the violence. A letter to Kerr of 2 September 1920 suggests that they had disagreed on the course of action to be taken by the government, which appeared to be to let the two sides bleed to death before forced to the negotiating table:

The Irish evolution you foretold in our last conversation is beginning to materialise... You told me in effect that you had no solution for the Irish difficulty until the inevitable sectarian conflict had shed so much blood, and – what probably counts more with the section of the coalition which dictates its Irish policy – had destroyed so much wealth that the leader of the Northern fanatics would approach the arch-terrorist in the south and they would decide to call a truce.<sup>54</sup>

Plunkett continued, however, to try and exert influence through Kerr. He believed that the 'Dominion plan' was a workable solution and was trying to lobby moderate opinion in Ireland, despite the fact that Kerr had told him it 'frankly did not count'. In doing so, Plunkett hoped to appeal to the two extremes: the extreme nationalists and the Ulster Unionists. But Kerr did not believe in a dominion solution for Ireland and does not seem to have taken Plunkett's intervention seriously. Plunkett subsequently wrote to Kerr in March 1921 regarding proposals for an armistice as a preliminary to

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<sup>54</sup> Horace Plunkett to Philip Kerr, 2 Sept 1920, Lothian Papers GD40/17/80/166-167.

a settlement. He referred to discussions that had taken place within a group surrounding Æ, and that it intended to send its proposals both to the Prime Minister and to de Valera. Plunkett was, in effect, using Kerr as a man 'on the inside' to press his case. Kerr's reply was dismissive:

There is war in Ireland today because the three parties to it are divided by principles which are irreconcilable, and yet which each holds with the strongest conviction. I don't see how you are to get peace in Ireland any more than you could in South Africa, until the said three parties can agree upon the fundamental basis of a settlement.<sup>55</sup>

Russell also wrote to Kerr in order to try and influence the government.<sup>56</sup> In late 1920, just before the passing of the Bill, he tried to counsel the government through Kerr on possible ways to find an alternative solution. He argued that the Government of Ireland Bill would not bring about a peaceful settlement and criticised the use of force on both sides. He suggested that a truce should be called in order for negotiations to take place between Irish elected members and representatives of the British government, and he believed that dominion status was more acceptable to Irish national aspirations than the measures allowed for in the Government of Ireland Bill. Economic grievances were a further complaint highlighted by Russell. He argued that Irish spending power had been exercised for British, and not for Irish, purposes and there was no provision in the Home Rule Bill that Imperial expenditure would be

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<sup>55</sup> Philip Kerr to Horace Plunkett, 24 March 1921, Lothian Papers GD40/17/80/175.

<sup>56</sup> G.W. Russell to Philip Kerr, 9 Dec 1920, Lloyd George Papers F/91/7/23.

balanced by an equivalent expenditure in Ireland. Therefore he urged financial independence as a necessary factor if friendship was to replace hostility.<sup>57</sup>

Kerr, however, believed in the merits of the Bill as it stood and supported the Prime Minister over the financial aspects. When it had been suggested at a Cabinet meeting in October 1920 that the government take a more liberal attitude to finance Lloyd George had refused. He had argued that 'The giving of Customs, Excise and Income Tax meant a great deal, and if this were done Ireland could not remain part of the United Kingdom'.<sup>58</sup> Although Kerr politely acknowledged Russell's letter, and told him he would pass it on, he was more inclined to agree with the views of Stephen Gwynn. Yet Kerr and Russell were clearly on good terms and the latter joked about Kerr's position in early 1921, stating that 'The enclosed pamphlet may aid you in your duty as intelligence officer of the Irish Committee of the Cabinet'.<sup>59</sup> This was perhaps not so far from the truth. As the violence in Ireland continued to escalate, Russell urged Kerr to 'Try and put some conscience into your Committee'.<sup>60</sup>

T.P. Gill was another individual, connected with Plunkett and Russell, who tried to influence Kerr over the 1920 Bill. Gill was a former Home Rule M.P. and from 1900 to 1923 was secretary to the department of agriculture and technical instruction, headed by Plunkett. Kerr had apparently asked Gill for his 'view of the problem of Irish settlement' in 1919 while the Cabinet Committee on Ireland was drawing up proposals. Gill replied in December 1919, advising against the two-parliament system.<sup>61</sup> He claimed to have tested opinion during a business trip through the

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> D.G. Boyce, *Englishmen and Irish Troubles, British Public Opinion and the Making of Irish Policy 1918-22*, p. 21.

<sup>59</sup> G.W. Russell to Philip Kerr, 11 Jan 1921, The Lothian Papers, GD40/17/78/53. The Pamphlet was Russell's 'A Plea for Justice, Being a demand for a Public Enquiry into the attacks on Cooperative Societies in Ireland', published by 'The Irish Homestead'.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> T.P. Gill to Philip Kerr, 5 Dec 1919, T.P. Gill Papers MS.13517(1).

counties of Armagh, Londonderry, Down and Antrim, with the result that he did not 'hear a word of approval of the two-parliament idea, but from many bitter opposition'. Gill argued that 'county option' would be a fairer form of safeguard for Ulster. He explained that to have two parliaments would endanger the chance of establishing authority in Ireland, 'by still further breaking up and disintegrating the idea of it'.

As the months went by, Gill clearly grew increasingly frustrated with the government's policy, as his letters to Kerr demonstrate. In May 1920 he re-stated his opinion that 'the double-headed regime – will be fatal, grotesquely so, from the point of view of efficiency and mere respect'.<sup>62</sup> He further wrote that 'I do hope that, by now, you have put my letter and memos before the P.M. I feel convinced that if he saw them, and especially my letter [he] would want to see me'.<sup>63</sup> In a separate letter, he expressed his displeasure at discussing the reform of Irish government 'at hasty interviews, especially at a stage when measures appear to have been decided'.<sup>64</sup> Gill felt that his position and experience warranted more respect. He continued:

It is not my view as to how one should be consulted, and the fact that this is the only way in which an administrator of my experience, achievement and position is being consulted is in itself significant...I cannot stand by on my dignity content to be a mere spectator...I endeavoured to thrust upon you yesterday a few points of valuable advice. I also wrote to you once or twice, as you asked me to do at our first interview. I do not propose to continue this practice...<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> T.P. Gill to Philip Kerr, 5 May 1920, T.P. Gill Papers MS. 13517(4).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> T.P. Gill to Philip Kerr, [?] May 1920, T.P. Gill Papers MS. 13517(4).

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

Gill finished by making clear two final points: that to start with two executives was a fatal flaw; and that the way out should be in the creation of a Statutory Constituent Assembly for all Ireland.

Gary Peatling has noted that 'Kerr much preferred the counsel of Redmondite Nationalist Stephen Gwynn'.<sup>66</sup> The latter supported the government's proposals. He believed that through establishing Home Rule in the six counties of Ulster Irish unity could eventually be achieved.<sup>67</sup> The Bill's provision for matters such as the railways, agriculture and old age pensions also meant that it would be in the national interest for the two sides to find common ground and to cooperate with one another. In acknowledging Nationalist objections to partition, the northern Catholic minority, and the limitation of powers, Gwynn argued that it made sense to work with the offer that was in place. To wait would be to leave things as they were. This was a message welcome in Downing Street and Kerr urged the Irish Secretary Hamar Greenwood to meet with Gwynn. In April 1920 Kerr noted that:

Stephen Gwynn is one of the few nationalists of independence who have taken a really sane view of things both during the convention and since, and who supports the present Bill. He has various suggestions to make about personnel in connection with Irish legislation which he would be glad if you would take into consideration.<sup>68</sup>

There is a considerable amount of correspondence between Kerr and Stephen Gwynn during 1919-21. Gwynn wrote to Kerr in December 1919 informing him of mixed reactions to the proposed Bill. The former's view was that the success of the

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<sup>66</sup> G.K. Peatling, *British Opinion and Irish Self-Government 1865-1925*, p.154.

<sup>67</sup> Stephen Gwynn, Undated Memo, Lothian Papers, GD40/17/606.

<sup>68</sup> Philip Kerr to Hamar Greenwood, 9 April 1920, Lothian Papers, GD40/17/79/146.

scheme depended on bribing Ulster. He advised that 'the Imperial constitution must be fixed so that by accepting H.R. Ireland will be better off, and this should not be by a narrow margin'.<sup>69</sup> Interestingly, there is no evidence of Kerr talking to other Redmondites, such as Tim Healy, William O'Brien, John Dillon or Joseph Devlin. It may be that Gwynn was preferred because he was a Protestant. Paul Bew also goes some way towards explaining why the British leadership trusted him.<sup>70</sup> Gwynn had made it clear that he thought Redmond should have accepted Carson's offer of a compromise in 1914: an open-ended exclusion of the six counties that would leave the way open for eventual unity on the basis of consent.<sup>71</sup> Bew argues that in neglecting the constitutional nationalist critique of the Anglo-Irish War, historians have failed to see that from the spring of 1920 British policy was based on the necessity of making a pragmatic deal with Sinn Féin.<sup>72</sup>

Kerr certainly saw Gwynn as a man with whom he could work. In a letter to Sir Auckland Geddes in July 1920, he explained that there was no-one else in Ireland with whom the British government could deal in representing Irish interests. Kerr argued that 'If you had a Botha, or even a Parnell, you could settle both with Ulster and with nationalist Ireland on satisfactory terms. But you have got no such men'. He further explained:

Even the nominal leaders of Sinn Féin such as Arthur Griffiths [sic] do not seem to have any effective control over the murder gang, and have got

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<sup>69</sup> Stephen Gwynn to Philip Kerr, 5 Dec 1919, Lothian Papers, GD40/17/78/4-8.

<sup>70</sup> Paul Bew 'Moderate Nationalism and the Irish Revolution, 1916-1923' in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (Sept, 1999), pp. 729-749.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 732.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 748-9.

themselves into such a position that it is practically impossible for them to make any move towards conciliation.<sup>73</sup>

This observation demonstrates that Kerr was aware that for much of the period Sinn Féin was not in control of the IRA. Lloyd George echoed Kerr's sentiments when he declared that he would 'stand by' the bill 'until someone with real authority in Ireland appeared with whom it was possible to negotiate'.<sup>74</sup> Kerr therefore saw Gwynn as a useful intermediary between the British and the Irish. Furthermore, even though he suspected that the situation would probably worsen in the following months, he believed that, fundamentally, the situation was improving because it was becoming apparent that Sinn Féin was holding out for something that England would not give. He suggested to Geddes that if they were to drop independence then the gap between Sinn Féin and the Bill would not be unbridgeable. Moreover, Kerr insisted that if Sinn Féin would not negotiate then the war would continue until they were broken.<sup>75</sup>

Alongside his support for repression in Ireland, Kerr recognised the seriousness of the situation. He reported to Geddes in July 1920 that the state of affairs in Ireland was as bad as ever due to the frequency of the outrages and the Sinn Féin control over large tracts of the country. He believed, however, that the events were somewhat exaggerated in the press, and that both the police and the new administration, under Hamar Greenwood, were becoming stronger and managing to take control.<sup>76</sup> Indeed Kerr appears to have had some doubts over the former secretary for Ireland, Ian MacPherson, in handling Irish affairs. In Kerr's view, the administration under MacPherson had led to disarray in allowing the arrest of Irish civilians under

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<sup>73</sup> Philip Kerr to Auckland Geddes, 5 July 1920, Lothian Papers, GD40/17/1397.

<sup>74</sup> Conference of Ministers, 13 Oct 1920, CAB 23/23, Quoted in Sheila Lawlor, *Britain and Ireland 1914-23* (Dublin, 1983) p. 65.

<sup>75</sup> Philip Kerr to Auckland Geddes, 5 July 1920, Lothian Papers, GD40/17/1397.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*



suspicion of IRA activity. Gwynn was also relieved by Greenwood's replacement of MacPherson in 1920.<sup>77</sup> Frank Owen has explained that MacPherson's nerve had gone by April 1920 and he lived in continual terror of assassination. In sharp contrast, Greenwood was a determined character, who did not know what nerves meant, and had the determination to tackle the problem without conceding on the point of an Irish republic.<sup>78</sup> Indeed Kerr was acutely aware of the geo-strategic issues:

You have only got to look at the map of German submarine sinkings to see that Irish independence would be the death blow of Great Britain, either if foreign submarines were able to base themselves in Irish ports, or even if British anti-submarine operations were not allowed to base themselves on the Irish coast.<sup>79</sup>

He referred Geddes to Lloyd George's belief that 'Great Britain could never concede independence, and would fight it to the end'.<sup>80</sup>

Kerr was at the height of his involvement in Irish affairs between 1919 and 1921. He enjoyed the Prime Minister's confidence, representing him at the Paris peace talks and supporting his Irish policy. Although his federal beliefs provided a context for his involvement in designing a settlement for Ireland, they were not the chief factor that determined his role. Kerr moved away from his Round Table colleagues during this period and instead viewed the Irish problem from the perspective of Downing Street. He worked closely on the 1920 Government of Ireland Bill and witnessed first-hand the difficulties the government faced in trying to appease all parties. Lloyd

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<sup>77</sup> Stephen Gwynn to Philip Kerr, 5 April [1920?], Lothian Papers GD40/17/78/1.

<sup>78</sup> Frank Owen, *Tempestuous Journey*, p. 564.

<sup>79</sup> Philip Kerr to Auckland Geddes, 5 July 1920, Lothian Papers, GD40/17/1397.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

George was the key influence on Kerr's views during these years and, as a result, he defended the government's policy of repression in Ireland. Although he was aware of the criticisms in the press, he maintained his belief that the government was right in its approach. To give in to the extreme nationalists would be to allow murder and assassination to drive policy. Kerr's reliance on individual contacts, such as Stephen Gwynn, suggests that the government was not using a wide range of advisors in 1919-21. He ignored such figures as Plunkett and Gill, and argued that the Government of Ireland Bill, rather than dominion status, provided a workable solution to the problem. Kerr hoped that the partition of Ulster would be a temporary measure that would lead to eventual unity, and structured the Bill accordingly. He always maintained confidence in it and sought to drive the legislation forward.

## Chapter 6

### Kerr, the United States and the Irish Question

American opinion was an important context for the making of the Government of Ireland Bill and there were distinct American elements to Anglo-Irish politics between 1919 and 1921. The United States has always played a significant part in the history of Irish resistance to British rule, largely due to the level of Irish immigration to America from the mid eighteenth century onwards. This became a more serious threat to the British government from 1916 as American assistance was sought in the First World War and the Irish problem threatened transatlantic relations. The level of Irish nationalist lobbying for American support became particularly threatening between 1919 and 1921 as the British government attempted to put a settlement in place and (from the British perspective) the illegal Irish government, Dáil Éireann, came into being on 7 January 1919. Kerr was closely involved in the American aspects of the Irish question during this period yet to date he has not been linked with this in any significant way. This chapter aims to address this through exploration of specific areas, including Irish attempts to influence the peace conference, the management of press opinion in the United States, intelligence relating to Irish-American activity, and American intervention in the Irish question.

Historians have produced a great deal of work on American involvement in the Irish question during the period concerned, notably *Ireland and Anglo-American Relations 1899-1921* by Alan J. Ward, and Francis M. Carroll's *American Opinion*

*and the Irish Question 1910-23*.<sup>1</sup> Both Ward and Carroll describe the difficulties faced by both the British and American governments in trying to maintain relations while Irish revolutionaries attempted to gain American support for their cause. Some work has also been produced on Kerr's connection with the United States during his life and career. The area of 'Anglo-American relations' is in fact a key theme for historians writing about him. Kerr was a British imperialist who greatly admired the United States and was interested in promoting stronger relations between the two nations. Both biographers, Butler and Billington, have referred to this in their respective works. In describing Kerr's appointment as Ambassador to the United States, Butler states that 'from the first he had liked America and Americans – he always felt fifteen years younger when he landed in New York, he said'.<sup>2</sup> In John Turner's volume *The Larger Idea, Lord Lothian and the Problem of National Sovereignty*, three of the chapters are dedicated to this theme in Kerr's life. These include pieces on the connection between the American federal system of government and Kerr's Imperial federation views, his role in paving the way to 'Lend-Lease' during the Second World War, and his time as Ambassador to the United States. One of the contributors, Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, has also written numerous articles on Kerr's American connections.<sup>3</sup> Yet there has been no study exploring the Irish dimension to Kerr's American interests and involvement.

Kerr has been described as belonging to a diverse group of 'Atlanticists' within public life who supported close Anglo-American diplomatic collaboration. B.J.C.

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<sup>1</sup> Alan J. Ward, *Ireland and Anglo-American Relations 1899-1921* (London, 1969); Francis M. Carroll, *American Opinion and the Irish Question 1910-23* (Dublin, 1978).

<sup>2</sup> J.R.M. Butler, *Lord Lothian (Philip Kerr) 1882-1940* (London, 1960) p. 257.

<sup>3</sup> These include 'The Inestimable Advantage of Not Being English: Lord Lothian's American Ambassadorship, 1939-1940' in *Scotland and America: Studies Illustrative of the Scots in the United States and Canada*, *The Scottish Historical Review* No. 63 (April, 1984) pp. 105-110; 'Lord Lothian and American Democracy: An Illusion in Pursuit of an Illusion' in *The Canadian Review of American Studies* No. 17 (Winter, 1986) pp. 411-422.

McKercher described this group as 'ranging from decided pro-Americans like Kerr and Cecil to more cautious ones such as Balfour and Lloyd George'.<sup>4</sup> Kerr was certainly pro-American. Early in his career he had been inspired by F.S. Oliver's *Alexander Hamilton* and admired the federal system of government in the United States.<sup>5</sup> As we have seen, his closest friend and confidante was Nancy Astor, and he converted to Christian Science, an American-based religion. During his time at Downing Street, however, Kerr did not have the level of experience or understanding of America and American politics that he would gain later, first as Secretary to the Rhodes Trust, and subsequently as the British Ambassador to the United States. One of Kerr's associates, Horace Plunkett, had spent time in America during the 1880s and his co-operation movement was greatly influenced by his American experience. But as the previous chapter demonstrated, Kerr was dismissive of Plunkett in 1919-21.

Prior to entering Lloyd George's secretariat Kerr had some limited experience of the American dimension to the Irish question. Chapter 3 of this thesis explored some of the ways in which Kerr used American contacts to address the Irish question as a member of 'The Round Table' in 1910. He recognised that contacts such as Bourke Cochran and Moreton Frewen were valuable in publicising the idea of a federal system of government for Ireland. Yet by 1916 Kerr was more concerned with the implications of American involvement in the war and the organisation of the peace that followed. He assisted Horace Plunkett at this time when the latter travelled to the United States with a view to speaking with President Woodrow Wilson and his foreign advisor, Colonel E.M. House, about Anglo-American relations. Plunkett had asked Kerr to put down on paper his views regarding the United States and peace-making, based on a conversation they had had, so that Plunkett could communicate

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<sup>4</sup> B.J.C. McKercher, *Esme Howard, A Diplomatic Biography* (Cambridge, 1989) p. 274.

<sup>5</sup> F.S. Oliver, *Alexander Hamilton: An Essay on American Union* (London, 1906).

these thoughts to Wilson and House.<sup>6</sup> Kerr disliked the idea that the United States might propose a 'drawn war':

For the fact that she [America] has failed to recognise officially that there is a moral issue in the War, makes it possible that she will be driven to suggest peace terms which would in effect involve the partial triumph of the militarist evil, on the humanitarian plea of saving human life.<sup>7</sup>

Although this letter demonstrates Kerr's concerns regarding British interests in the war, it also reveals his use of a prominent Irish figure in furthering links with the United States. Ireland was one of the most dangerous sources of Anglo-American disagreement and it was fortunate that Colonel House was on good terms with Plunkett as the latter could explain the issues to President Wilson.<sup>8</sup> According to Seymour, as a result of Plunkett's information, Wilson was able to resist pressure to sponsor protests against British policy in Ireland, which would have endangered Anglo-American cooperation.<sup>9</sup>

As the previous chapter explained, the peace negotiations that took place after the war provided an important context to the government's subsequent Irish policy. The same was true of the American dimension to the Irish problem between 1919 and 1921. Kerr experienced his first serious dealings with Ireland and the United States at the Paris peace conference. The newly formed Dáil Éireann wasted no time in seizing the opportunity of the conference to present its case for independence. Eamon de Valera sought American assistance. As a result of President Wilson's declaration of

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<sup>6</sup> Philip Kerr to A.J. Balfour, 14 Dec 1916, A.J. Balfour Papers Add.49797/14.

<sup>7</sup> Philip Kerr to Horace Plunkett, 5 Dec 1916, A.J. Balfour Papers Add.49797/20-21.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Seymour (ed.), *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House, Vol. III, Into the World War April 1917-June 1918* (London, 1928) p.79.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 79-82.

support for the rights of small nations, and the principle of self-determination, there appeared to be some hope of the Irish gaining a sympathetic hearing. At the first public session of the Dáil, three delegates to the conference were appointed: de Valera, Arthur Griffith, and George Noble, Count Plunkett. As two of the appointed delegates, de Valera and Griffith were in jail at the time, Sean T. O'Kelly, chairman of the Dáil, was chosen to go to Paris as 'Envoy of the Irish Republic' to try and secure their admission to the conference.<sup>10</sup> Following O'Kelly's unsuccessful attempt, the Dáil looked to Irish-Americans to support their efforts. At the Philadelphia Irish Race Convention in February 1919, three Irish-American delegates were selected to take up the Irish cause. The three men, Frank P. Walsh, Michael J. Ryan and Edward F. Dunne, took the title of the 'American Commission on Irish Independence' and sought to lobby the British and American delegations in order to help them gain entry for the Irish delegates. If they were unsuccessful in their mission they were to present the Irish case themselves.

The Commission requested that Wilson use his influence to obtain passports for the Irish delegates to attend the conference. The President, however, refused to see them on the grounds that he was too occupied with the business of the talks. Instead, the British tried to alleviate the situation by providing the Commission with passports to visit Ireland. Although Frank Owen states that Lloyd George readily provided the Irish-American delegates with the passports in order to relieve the prejudice against Britain in the United States, it was in fact Kerr who was influential in arranging this.<sup>11</sup> According to the diary and correspondence of the Commission, Kerr was contacted by William C. Bullit, who was in charge of the Intelligence department for the American

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<sup>10</sup> Frank Owen, *Tempestuous Journey* (London, 1954) p. 557.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 558.



section of the peace conference.<sup>12</sup> Although Kerr replied confidentially that it was possible that the Irish would gain passports, the Americans would surely understand that the British could never allow them to appear before the peace conference. He did, however, agree to meet Walsh and Bullit to discuss matters further. The Commission recorded in its diary that Kerr was known to have a very great influence over Lloyd George, especially with regards to the Irish question.<sup>13</sup> Indeed he sought to arrange a meeting between the American Commission and the Prime Minister. In the mean time the Commission would visit Ireland to meet with their Irish counterparts.

Kerr's behind-the-scenes influence appeared to be proving successful for the Commission, yet it proved to be disastrous for the British when the delegation arrived in Ireland. The members were greeted by huge crowds and parades. They made controversial speeches in support of Irish self-government, met with Sinn Féin leaders, and visited prisons to inspect conditions. The British press covered the visit in detail and there are numerous clippings and reports in Kerr's papers charting the Commission's activities.<sup>14</sup> This was highly embarrassing for both the Americans and the British, and Lloyd George was no longer prepared to meet the Commission or to grant passports to the Irish delegates. President Wilson would have no more involvement in their efforts, such was the potential damage that may have been done to transatlantic relations. In his article, 'The Versailles Treaty and the Irish Americans', John B. Duff has discussed the exasperation felt by Wilson as a result of

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<sup>12</sup> F.M. Carroll (ed.) *The American Commission on Irish Independence 1919: The Diary, Correspondence and Report*, p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>14</sup> 'Papers Relating to the American Commission on Irish Independence' The Lothian Papers GD40/17/575-80.

the Irish-American agitation.<sup>15</sup> The President was relying on British support for his League of Nations scheme and did not wish to put this in jeopardy.

'The Irish League of Nations Society' also communicated with Kerr in order to appeal to Lloyd George on the basis that it had a legitimate case for appearing before the League of Nations, an organisation set up in the wake of the peace conference on President Wilson's recommendation. In November 1919 Lord Robert Cecil forwarded an appeal to Kerr from the Society, asking him to draw it to the Prime Minister's attention if he felt it was worthwhile.<sup>16</sup> The appeal quoted President Wilson's statement that a 'forum should be created to which all people could bring any matter which was likely to affect the peace and freedom of the world' and made reference to self-determination for Ireland, arguing that if dominion status was granted to Ireland then she would be entitled to representation at the League of Nations.<sup>17</sup> Ultimately, the plea was for the recognition of the Irish question as an international one. Kerr replied to Cecil, explaining that he had been in touch with the Irish League of Nations Society for some time (although there appears to be no surviving correspondence between the Society and Kerr). He noted that he would draw Lloyd George's attention to the appeal if he felt that it served any useful purpose and explained that 'The League of Nations has hitherto pursued, except in America, [a] fairly uncontroversial course, but I am afraid this could not be said to be true of the view which the Irish Society takes of its functions'.<sup>18</sup> Kerr was clearly irritated by Irish attempts to use the League in order to further their case for independence.

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<sup>15</sup> John B. Duff, 'The Versailles Treaty and the Irish-Americans' *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 55, No. 3, (December, 1968), pp. 582-598.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Cecil to Philip Kerr, 7 Nov 1919, Lothian Papers GD40/17/207/140.

<sup>17</sup> Irish League of Nations Society to Lord Robert Cecil, [c. 7 November 1919], Lothian Papers GD40/17/207/141.

<sup>18</sup> Philip Kerr to Robert Cecil, 10 Nov 1919, Lothian Papers GD40/17/207/145.

The attempts by the Irish to address the peace conference, and the actions of the American Commission on Irish Independence, were likely to have been contributing factors to Lloyd George's recognition of the immediate need to address the Irish question. Just as the Irish Convention of 1917 had been held in part to appease American opinion of Irish affairs, the Government of Ireland Act was in part designed to this end. It seems likely that the Irish lobbying at the peace conference had played its part in highlighting the necessity of pushing ahead with an Irish settlement and American opinion was an important consideration in this. The papers of the 'Cabinet Committee on Ireland' reveal just how important the American context was. A memorandum from Viscount Grey in Washington expressed concerns over the effect that Irish affairs had on policy in the United States.<sup>19</sup> He believed that the absence of an announcement about self-government for Ireland was doing great harm and urged that 'Irish hostility is at present an active and might become a critically unfavourable influence in American politics, that a statement of Irish policy on self-government lines is now very desirable and might at any time become very urgent'.<sup>20</sup> He recommended that the Committee inform him of the outlines of the new Irish policy in case he had observations to make in relation to how it may influence American opinion.

The American context was therefore a pressing consideration and the members of the Committee were kept updated on American opinion during their deliberations. In a report by the joint-secretary to the Committee, Lawrence Burgis, it was explained that the behaviour of the Irish had rendered the agitation unpopular with the United States government. This was assumed to be as a result of 'Irish co-operation with the

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<sup>19</sup> Grey was in Washington as a special ambassador from September 1919 to try and persuade the Senate to join the League of Nations.

<sup>20</sup> Memo by Viscount Grey, 'SECRET. C.I.1.' 4 Oct 1919, Cabinet Papers CAB/27/69/1.

enemy'.<sup>21</sup> But the report acknowledged that the change in attitude in America had been as a result of the actions of the extreme Irish, rather than approval of British policy. It stated that 'The impression that a small nationality is not "getting a fair show" at British hands is easily implemented'.<sup>22</sup> The Committee therefore attempted to weigh up the exact nature of American opinion. In a resumé of American press opinion on the Irish Question it was reported that:

The opinions and views taken by nearly every newspaper in the United States are distinctly hostile to England on the Irish question. There appears to be little doubt that the Sinn Fein campaign organised by De Valera has by its methods of propaganda captured nearly every newspaper and has produced a strong anti-English and pro-Irish tone throughout them. The only notable exception appears to be the 'Boston Christian Science Monitor' which is a paper with an international reputation and well-informed independent news services. It remains warmly pro-English and this is possibly due to the fact that it is an anti-Catholic organ.<sup>23</sup>

The point regarding *The Christian Science Monitor* is fascinating given Kerr's beliefs and later connection with the paper. He would write regularly for the *Monitor* in the years after he left Downing Street. It is not clear whether Kerr wrote this particular press resumé, although it is certainly possible. It seems unlikely, however, that he would claim that the *Monitor* was 'pro-English' due to it being an 'anti-Catholic organ'. The next chapter will deal with Kerr's faith in more detail, but it is worth

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<sup>21</sup> Report by Lawrence Burgis, 'SECRET C.I.1' 13 Oct 1919, Cabinet Papers CAB/27/69/1.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> 'Resume of the American Press Opinion on the Irish Question' [c. Oct 1919], Cabinet Papers CAB/27/69/1.

noting that English Catholics did not associate their brand of Catholicism with that of the Irish.

Kerr's position as one of the secretaries of the Committee meant that he dealt with most of the material relating to American opinion. This included the question of the American press. He was already fully aware of the damage that been done with regards to American public opinion as a result of Irish propaganda in the United States. In his 1919 *Round Table* article, entitled 'The Harvest of Victory', he wrote that 'America in her self-concentration has allowed herself to be deceived by Irish propagandists'.<sup>24</sup> Kerr seems to have been suggesting that American public opinion would not be Anglophobic without Irish propaganda. He had been advised by 'One of the best American newspaper organizers, Waldo' that publicity would be an effective cure for many United States misconceptions on Irish matters.<sup>25</sup> Before the Government of Ireland Bill was formally introduced in Parliament, some consideration would thus have to be given to its presentation in the United States.

In Kerr's papers relating to the Government of Ireland Bill there is a document from the publicity department outlining an estimate of the propaganda expenditure for the United States, along with an overview of the scheme.<sup>26</sup> A plan was drawn up to carry out an intensive publicity campaign there for a period of six months, based on the settlement that was reached and the various parties' reactions to it. The scheme was extensive and J. Tilley noted that:

We may look for a plan of some duration, during which every sort of misstatement will be made and every opportunity utilised to prejudice the issue. To counter-act this it will not suffice merely to present the true facts in

<sup>24</sup> [Philip Kerr], 'The Harvest of Victory' in *The Round Table* No. 36 (September, 1919) p. 670.

<sup>25</sup> Lord Northcliffe to Philip Kerr, 30 Sept 1918, Lothian Papers GD40/17/216.

<sup>26</sup> J. Tilley to Philip Kerr, 7 Nov 1919, Lothian Papers GD40/17/585.

the form of categorical statements. They will require to be constantly and skilfully reiterated in such a way as to appeal to the interest and sympathy of different classes in America.<sup>27</sup>

The campaign was to involve ordinary news, signed and unsigned articles, interviews, pamphlets and lectures. The estimated expenditure for the operation, and the extra staff involved, came to £9,500 for a period of six months.

It is unclear how serious this scheme really was. It may well have been merely a superficial exercise which did not actively target the key groups in American society or try to determine the true nature of American attitudes towards the British government's Irish policy. Nevertheless, following the introduction of the government's proposals in December 1919, Kerr sent a memorandum to Lloyd George attaching a report by the publicity department on the reaction of the American press. Kerr wrote that:

I gather that your speech and the Irish proposals have had a good press in America...Your speech is being reprinted in America and circulated to all newspapers. I am arranging for the same to be done in the Dominions and for it to be circulated to all Embassies abroad.<sup>28</sup>

The report that he attached stated that three important points had been picked up by the American papers. Firstly, the proposals were prominently printed so that they were not left open to misrepresentation. Secondly, the parallel had been drawn between Ireland and a constituent state in America, and it was explained that

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<sup>27</sup> J. Tilley to Philip Kerr, 7 Nov 1919, Lothian Papers GD40/17/585.

<sup>28</sup> Philip Kerr to Lloyd George, 2 Jan 1920, Lloyd George Papers F/90/1/1.

“secession” cannot be contemplated by Great Britain’.<sup>29</sup> Finally, the report observed ‘A keener realisation of the difficulties of the problem especially in view of the position of Ulster’.<sup>30</sup> There was, however, not a wide sample of newspapers and their reactions; rather the report focused on New York based papers and correspondents, presumably due to the large numbers of Irish-Americans there. Papers such as the isolationist *Daily News* and *New York World*, which supported Woodrow Wilson, were bound to take a positive view of the government’s Irish proposals. The author of the press report, C.J. Phillips, wrote that criticism and opposition was ‘almost confined to Irish elements in America’. In pointing to ‘our future line of action’ he recorded the intention to refrain from ‘anything like an aggressive propaganda campaign in favour of the Irish proposals’.<sup>31</sup>

This in fact puts forward a rather misleading view of the actual state of Anglo-American relations during the period concerned. In the run up to the 1920 presidential election the Irish question was exploited as an issue by Democrats in general, and also by Republican isolationist candidates, such as Senator Hiram Johnson of California. Thomas A. Bailey noted that the Irish in America were generally Democratic and for every Irishman that the Republicans could turn against Wilson ‘represented a gain of more than one vote’.<sup>32</sup> Wilson’s failure to secure self-determination for Ireland in Paris had angered Irish-Americans and there was widespread opposition to his League of Nations scheme. Presidential candidates were quick to exploit this in appealing to Irish-American voters. The British government may have been keen to secure support for its Irish policy in 1919-20, but there is reason to suggest that any publicity campaign was ineffective. American journalist

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<sup>29</sup> C.J. Phillips to Philip Kerr, 2 Jan 1920, Lloyd George Papers F/90/1/1.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas A. Bailey, *Woodrow Wilson and the Great Betrayal* (New York, 1945) p. 25.



and satirist H.L. Mencken actually argued in February 1920 that British pressure on American journalism increased bad feeling between the two countries. He wrote that:

The English, usually so skilful at leading the Yankee by the nose, now show a distressing lack of form. Their papers begin to go on at a furious rate, denouncing everything as dishonest and disgusting. The doctrine that Americans won the war – a very tender point – is laughed at.<sup>33</sup>

American Anglophobia was not by any means confined to Irish-American elements of society. The Versailles Treaty had been widely unpopular for a variety of reasons which Bailey sets forth in his classic work, *Woodrow Wilson and the Great Betrayal*. He says of 1919: 'Seldom have times been more out of joint for great masses of Americans'.<sup>34</sup> An army of four million men had been demobilised and industrial demobilisation was also a colossal undertaking. The fear of Bolshevism meant that socialists were unusually active, while the railroads were in a confused state following the government take-over during the war. Bailey notes that more dangerous than any of these was the opposition of large numbers of the public, including immigrant groups, the Irish-Americans foremost among these, but also German and Italian-Americans. Aside from immigrant groups there were liberals, isolationists and 'professional British-haters' who opposed the treaty and feared American cooperation with Britain. Chief among these 'British-haters' was newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst, whose five million readers were becoming more Anglophobic by the day as his papers denounced the leading

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<sup>33</sup> H.L. Mencken 'A Carnival of Buncombe, February 9, 1920' in Malcolm Moos (ed), H.L. Mencken, *A Carnival of Buncombe* (Baltimore, 1965) p. 7.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas A. Bailey, *Woodrow Wilson and the Great Betrayal*, p. 18.

Anglophile candidate, Herbert Hoover, for courting British diplomats and ministers. Mencken wrote in February 1920 that:

Hoover, it appears by these Hearstian blasts, is actually no more than a pussyfoot sent out by Lloyd George, Sir George Paish and company to insinuate himself into the confidence of innocent Americans, seduce them into voting for him. So hoist himself into the White House – and then hand over the country to the unholy English.<sup>35</sup>

In his report from the publicity department, C.J. Phillips most certainly did not comment on the reception of the government's Irish proposals by any of Hearst's publications.

Kerr does not appear to have been fully aware of the strength of American Anglophobia and it is possible that, as a direct result, Lloyd George remained ill informed. His ignorance was perhaps further due to his personal contact with both Wilson and House in Paris, both strong Anglophiles. Kerr was also in regular contact with John S. Steele in 1919-20. Steele had been the managing editor of the Edward Marshall Newspaper Syndicate before leaving to take charge of the London Bureau of the isolationist *Chicago Tribune* in September 1919. Steele appears to have been pro-British and told Kerr that he wanted 'to help in maintaining and promoting those good relations between our countries which are being jeopardized by this wretched Irish mess'.<sup>36</sup> In January 1920 he sent Kerr cuttings from the *Tribune* in which was reported the Friends of Irish Freedom resolution to condemn the *Chicago Tribune* for

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<sup>35</sup> H.L. Mencken 'A Carnival of Buncombe, February 9, 1920' in Malcolm Moos (ed), H.L. Mencken, *A Carnival of Buncombe* (Baltimore, 1965) p. 6.

<sup>36</sup> John S. Steele to Philip Kerr, 19 Sept 1919, Lothian Papers GD40/17/219/766.

its anti-Irish bias; he thought this would amuse Kerr.<sup>37</sup> This might have added to Kerr's impression of the pro-British tone of American public opinion.

Kerr however recognised the distinction between Irish-American support for Irish nationalism and the position of the American government. A statement he made to Lloyd George in 1920 confirms this. In 1920 there had been considerable agitation by Irish-American nationalists for the recognition of Ireland's right to independence by the American government. Following the failure of this Congress did take some unofficial action in the form of a letter to Lloyd George, protesting against the imprisonment of Irishmen without trial.<sup>38</sup> In response, Kerr argued that 'everybody knows that every politician in America has to play up to the Irish game, and that all this agitation is merely window dressing with a view to meeting the presidential election.'<sup>39</sup> Kerr did not think that the transatlantic relationship was seriously threatened by the Irish agitation; rather he saw Ireland as a thorn in the relationship's side. Having advised Lloyd George merely to acknowledge the message from the congressmen, he admitted 'I should rather like to send an insulting reply but I don't think the Prime Minister of Great Britain can do that'.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, the following July Kerr informed the British Ambassador in Washington, Auckland Geddes, that the Irish situation was beginning to improve. He believed that:

Sinn Féin is gradually finding out that it is not all beer and skittles challenging the existence of the British Empire, especially when it finds that the United

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<sup>37</sup> John S. Steele to Philip Kerr, 8 Jan 1920, Lothian Papers GD40/17/219/782.

<sup>38</sup> Francis M. Carroll, *American Opinion and the Irish Question 1910-23*, p. 154.

<sup>39</sup> Philip Kerr to Lloyd George, 8 May 1920, The Lothian Papers GD40/17/1276.

<sup>40</sup> Philip Kerr to Lloyd George, 8 May 1920, The Lothian Papers GD40/17/1276.

States has definitely made up its mind not to quarrel with Great Britain for the sake of the Irish politician.<sup>41</sup>

Although Kerr admitted that the situation in Ireland was as bad as ever, he seemed confident that the American government was not prepared to damage relations with Great Britain on account of Irish-American lobbying and extreme Irish nationalist activity. Kerr continued to believe this following the Republican electoral victory in November 1920 and the succession of Warren G. Harding to the presidency. In December 1920 Henry Wickham Steed, editor of *The Times*, informed Kerr that 'If there is nothing in the nature of at least an embryonic settlement before March, we shall find the new American administration goaded into doing something unpleasant which the Government may not be able to ignore.'<sup>42</sup> Kerr however was not concerned by this information:

My information about the Republican Administration does not entirely confirm yours. I have no doubt that strong pressure will be exerted by another campaign, but I gather that they are determined to be extremely cautious about all their moves in foreign affairs and I do not think there is any likelihood of their being stampeded into rash action.<sup>43</sup>

In the long-term Kerr would remain much more concerned about the potential damage that Irish-American support for Irish aspirations could do to the British Empire.

Between June 1919 and December 1920 the president of Dáil Éireann, Eamon de Valera, embarked on an eighteen-month publicity trip to the United States following

<sup>41</sup> Philip Kerr to Sir Auckland Geddes, 5 July 1920, The Lothian Papers GD40/17/1397.

<sup>42</sup> Henry Wickham Steed to Philip Kerr, 30 December 1920, Lothian Papers GD40/17/80/213.

<sup>43</sup> Philip Kerr to Henry Wickham Steed, 31 December 1920, Lothian Papers GD40/17/80/215.

his escape from Lincoln jail. This has been well documented by historians, film makers and by de Valera's biographers. His stage-managed surprise appearance at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York, shortly after his arrival, was highly embarrassing for both governments. Historians have differed in their accounts of how successful the American trip was for de Valera. In the most recent in-depth assessment of de Valera's career Diarmaid Ferriter writes that, on paper at least, the trip appeared to be a big success as a fundraiser. It was 'a considerable propaganda triumph, but it also created conflict and rows and failed to achieve the recognition of the Irish Republic'.<sup>44</sup> Without the benefit of hindsight, however, the campaign was worrying for the British government as it was eighteen months long and threatening in terms of the financial assistance that Sinn Féin acquired. Although literature exists on British intelligence on Irish nationalists during this period, the intelligence that Kerr received from American, or American based, sources has remained relatively unexplored by historians.<sup>45</sup> There has been a lack of focus on informants that government aides, such as Kerr, had access to. Letters to Lloyd George from Louis Tracy of the British Bureau of Information in New York are particularly intriguing.<sup>46</sup> The letters are in the Lothian collection, suggesting that Kerr dealt with this correspondence on behalf of the Prime Minister. The 'British Bureau of Information' in New York had been closed down at the end of the war, yet Tracy continued to send detailed correspondence regarding Sinn Féin activity in the United States.

Writing in February 1920 he warned that:

<sup>44</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter, *Judging Dev* (Dublin, 2007) p. 34.

<sup>45</sup> Christopher Andrew, *Secret Service* (London, 1985) pp. 246-258; Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, *American Espionage* (London, 1977) pp. 114-118; Eunan O'Halpin, 'British Intelligence in Ireland, 1914-1921' in Christopher Andrew and David Dilks (eds), *The Missing Dimension* (London, 1984).

<sup>46</sup> For more on Tracy see John D. Squires, 'A Whiff of Collaboration, The Tracy-Shiel Connection' in *Shiel's Collaborators II: Louis Tracy (1863-1928)* (August, 2006), [http://alangullette.com/lit/shiel/essays/shiel\\_tracy.htm](http://alangullette.com/lit/shiel/essays/shiel_tracy.htm) pp. 26-27.

De Valera and associates have almost perfected a scheme possibly far more dangerous to Britain than anything yet attempted, as it connotes nothing less than a revolution in Ireland coinciding with serious out-breaks in Egypt and India and with a determined effort to so control public opinion in this country that the Senate and Congress may actually be moved to recognise the Irish Republic.<sup>47</sup>

The Senate had previously rejected the Versailles Treaty with Ireland one of the issues that led to the rejection. Tracy urged that it would be a mistake to treat the threat too lightly as the Sinn Féin movement in America was widespread and had enthusiastic financial supporters such as Henry Ford of Detroit, founder of the Ford Motor Company. He claimed that the movement was 'widespread, well organised, and malignant in purpose'.<sup>48</sup> He also expressed particular concern over the role of the Catholic Church in assisting the Irish cause in financing and sheltering members of the movement (this will be dealt with further in the following chapter). His concerns over the movements of Sean Nunan, who he describes as 'The man who has charge of the Assassination Department' and 'a very dangerous person', reveal the level of concern that Tracy expressed in his letters.<sup>49</sup>

Very little has been written about Nunan, although historians have made passing references to him in their work, nearly always in relation to the American campaign. David Fitzpatrick describes Nunan as a 'puny Londoner with Limerick origins'.<sup>50</sup> His parents lived in the capital and C. Desmond Greaves wrote that 'The father was an old I.R.B. man, and Labour supporter. He and his wife kept open house to members of

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<sup>47</sup> Louis Tracy to Philip Kerr, 24 Feb 1920, Lothian Papers GD40/17/78/75.

<sup>48</sup> Louis Tracy to Philip Kerr, 24 Feb 1920, Lothian Papers GD40/17/78/75-79.

<sup>49</sup> Louis Tracy to Philip Kerr, 26 Feb 1920, Lothian Papers GD40/17/78/82.

<sup>50</sup> David Fitzpatrick, *Harry Boland's Irish Revolution* (Cork, 2003) p. 127.

the Irish movement in London'.<sup>51</sup> Nunan was a comrade of both Michael Collins and Harry Boland, having become intimate with Collins during their internment at Frongoch in 1916, and later became one of four clerks at the first meeting of the Dáil in January 1919.<sup>52</sup> A letter written to Collins from New York in September 1919 suggests that Nunan went to the United States to assist with de Valera's campaign there.<sup>53</sup> Greaves described Nunan as de Valera's secretary during the American trip. He wrote that the suite at the Waldorf Astoria in New York, where de Valera based himself, was the scene of constant activity and from there Nunan helped with the campaign, along with Mellows and Boland.<sup>54</sup>

Tracy's intelligence presented Nunan as a considerable threat. He reported that Nunan had 'at times been known to wear the clothes of a Roman Catholic Priest, though he is not one' and linked him with 'Mellowes, Lajpat Rai, and the Egyptian Nationalist Section'.<sup>55</sup> Yet Nunan does not appear to have been any more 'dangerous' than Harry Boland or Liam Mellows, although Tracy was correct in linking the Irish campaigners with Lajpat Rai. The Indian politician and reformer, Lala Lajpat Rai, had popularised the Indian nationalist struggle in America through his publication *Young India* and his foundation of the Indian Home Rule League of America in 1915.<sup>56</sup> Greaves indicates that Lajpat Rai had attended the Philadelphia Race Convention and probably met Mellows there.<sup>57</sup> They later addressed a meeting together on 24 April 1919 at St. John's Hall in Newark, New Jersey. Greaves writes:

<sup>51</sup> C. Desmond Greaves, *Liam Mellows and the Irish Revolution* (Belfast, 2004) p. 220 (first ed. London, 1971).

<sup>52</sup> 'First Dáil Éireann 1919' at RTE Libraries and Archives [www.rte.ie](http://www.rte.ie).

<sup>53</sup> Sean Nunan to Michael Collins, 3 Sept 1919, Documents on Irish Foreign Policy No. 25 NAI DE 2/292, [www.difp.ie](http://www.difp.ie).

<sup>54</sup> C. Desmond Greaves, *Liam Mellows and the Irish Revolution*, p. 209.

<sup>55</sup> Louis Tracy to Philip Kerr, 26 Feb 1920, Lothian Papers GD40/17/78/82.

<sup>56</sup> Ian Talbot, 'Rai, Lala Lajpat (1865–1928)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn, Oxford University Press, May 2007; online edn, Oct 2008.

<sup>57</sup> C. Desmond Greaves, *Liam Mellows and the Irish Revolution*, p. 205.



Thereafter Indians contributed regularly to the 'Irish Press'. The two movements grew closer together. Not only did Irish speakers support the campaign against the deportation of Indian militants, but the Irish Republican seamen provided the safest line of communication between the national movement in India and the Indian exiles throughout the world.<sup>58</sup>

Although we have no sense of his immediate reaction to Tracy's observations in 1920, a letter that Kerr wrote to Lloyd George in 1921 seems to be partly based on information from this source the previous year. Kerr was managing director of Lloyd George's newspaper, *The Daily Chronicle*, at that point and wrote to the Prime Minister from Fleet Street describing 'disquieting' information about 'American Sinn Féin'.<sup>59</sup> He was worried by the fact that the American agitation was linked with groups such as Indians and Egyptians, and 'haters of England' in France and Germany. He explained that such groups saw a real chance of 'smashing the British Empire' as they believed that if they could secure an Irish republic then the same could be achieved in India and Egypt.<sup>60</sup> It is possible to make a link here between Lajpat Rai's connection with the Irish movement and Kerr's involvement with Indian affairs in the 1930s. He did not want to see the government repeat the same mistakes in India that had been made in Ireland.

De Valera's prolonged campaign in the United States, along with the escalating Anglo-Irish War at home (under the management of Michael Collins for Sinn Féin in de Valera's absence), probably helped to persuade Kerr of the potential benefit of the mediation attempt by Colonel House in 1920. Kerr's confidence in the American officials was no doubt aided by his acquaintance with President Wilson and Colonel

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Philip Kerr to Lloyd George, 14 Sept 1921, Lloyd George Papers F/34/2/7.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

House at the Paris peace conference. In his recent biography of House, Godfrey Hodgson has commented that 'both House and Wilson were conservative in their instincts. Neither had much sympathy for European socialism, for Russian revolutionists, or even in practice for Irish nationalism'.<sup>61</sup> He adds that 'Both were instinctively Anglophile, House more so than Wilson. House found the British annoyingly cautious'.<sup>62</sup> House had sailed to England immediately after the conference in June 1919 and, with his wife, 'launched on a summer of furious social activity. Every aristocratic door was open to them now'.<sup>63</sup> Although Hodgson does not say so, this was quite possibly down to Kerr. House met the Astors during his visit and, in later years, visited Kerr (he was then Lord Lothian) at his home, Blickling Hall. It was perhaps through this connection with Kerr that House offered to mediate between the government and Sinn Féin in July 1920.

Turner and Dockrill have described the interviews that Kerr held with House on Lloyd George's behalf.<sup>64</sup> House was not representing Wilson in this initiative and was almost certainly acting independently. The relationship between House and Wilson had deteriorated in early 1919 and, by March, Wilson no longer used House as a confidential advisor. By the time the latter held conversations with Kerr in July 1920, Wilson's wife, Edith Bolling Galt Wilson, was dealing with important matters of state on behalf of her husband due to Wilson's debilitating stroke of October 1919. Edith Wilson famously disliked House and his position was weakened as a result. It is therefore convincing to suggest that as a mediator between the Irish and the British House was an independent agent.

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<sup>61</sup> Godfrey Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand, The Life of Colonel Edward M. House* (Yale, 2006) p. 106.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* p. 248.

<sup>64</sup> John Turner and Michael Dockrill in John Turner (ed.) *The Larger Idea, Lord Lothian and the Problem of National Sovereignty* (London, 1988) p. 37.

David P. Billington has claimed that Kerr welcomed the offer by Colonel House to mediate.<sup>65</sup> In order to win over the British public to the use of force, Kerr believed it would be necessary to exhaust the options of diplomacy.<sup>66</sup> In a letter to Lloyd George regarding his conversation with House, he explained that 'I think you will have to be able to prove that you have exhausted every expedient to arrive at an agreed solution, before you settle down to force'.<sup>67</sup> Yet, at the same time, he stated: 'I doubt if the House move, even if it comes off, will be enough, for it won't be public'.<sup>68</sup> Kerr did not believe that a settlement was possible in July 1920. In a letter to Lloyd George he wrote:

My own opinion for what it is worth is this. I am not hopeful for a settlement at present. The chasm to be bridged is still terribly wide. I doubt if Ireland is yet prepared to accept as a final settlement the only terms which it is possible for the British Empire to concede.<sup>69</sup>

Although he held out no hope for the 'House move', Kerr presumably thought that it would do no harm and at least the government could demonstrate that diplomacy had been attempted.

Kerr apparently made it very clear to House what, in his view, the British government's position was in relation to the Sinn Féin leaders. The report of their conversation suggests that Kerr left him in no doubt of the British position and spoke

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<sup>65</sup> David P. Billington, Jr., *Lothian, Philip Kerr and the Quest for World Order* (Westport, 2006) p. 68.

<sup>66</sup> John Turner and Michael Dockrill in John Turner (ed.) *The Larger Idea, Lord Lothian and the Problem of National Sovereignty*, p. 37.

<sup>67</sup> Kerr to Lloyd George 31 July 1920, Lloyd George Papers F/90/1/14

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

‘purely personally and without authorisation’.<sup>70</sup> In explaining the Prime Minister’s view, Kerr emphasised a number of points that the British side would not be moved on. He made it clear that there was no room for compromise in any settlement over the British control of foreign affairs or defence because the issue involved Britain and her Empire. In addition, Ulster was to be dealt with as a separate entity. Furthermore Kerr emphatically stated that:

Anything like independence was utterly out of the question. The effective authority of the United Kingdom Parliament in foreign affairs and defence would be maintained at any cost.<sup>71</sup>

It was unclear at that point whether or not the Sinn Féin leaders would allow House to speak with them and, in the end, his attempt was fruitless. Nevertheless, before this became apparent Kerr told House that the Prime Minister thought it would be useful if he (House) got in touch with Sinn Féin in order to test the position and bring home to them what they were up against. In Kerr’s words, ‘His task would not be to negotiate, but to get them onto the other end of the bridge’.<sup>72</sup> He further made it clear to House that the British people would not tolerate Irish independence:

Up to the present the Government had not attempted to mobilise public opinion against Ireland, but that if it was going to be war, in order to prevent Ireland from becoming an independent republic, there could be only one issue

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<sup>70</sup> Kerr to Lloyd George 31 July 1920, ‘Note of an interview with Colonel House, Thursday, 29<sup>th</sup> July 1920’ Lloyd George Papers F/90/1/14.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

to it. Once Great Britain realised that its own safety was at stake, it would not hesitate to find the means necessary to overcome Irish resistance.<sup>73</sup>

House was not the only American mediator that Kerr had dealings with in 1920-21. As previously noted, he was in regular contact with John S. Steele of the *Chicago Tribune* in 1919-21. American journalists, such as Steele, claimed to have greater success in approaching the leading figures of the Irish resistance movement. In turn, Steele made no secret of the fact that he wanted to make use of Kerr in securing an interview with Lloyd George about the Irish situation. Following his move to the *Chicago Tribune* in September 1919, he wrote to Kerr noting 'I am losing no time in trying to make use of my friends, among whom I hope, I may continue to regard you'.<sup>74</sup> It is unlikely Steele got his interview with Lloyd George at this time. Rather, he continued to lobby Kerr into 1920, referring in January to 'my campaign for an interview' and was disappointed at a conversation printed in *The New York Times* between Lloyd George and journalist Charles H. Grasty. He wrote a note to Kerr, enclosing the clipping, and commenting 'I wish I could have got this. Is there any chance of that interview?'<sup>75</sup> Kerr may have been using the promise of an interview that never materialised as the carrot leading the donkey, as Steele was prepared to supply the former with information. Following a trip to Ireland he wrote to Kerr describing its success and observing 'Now about what you wanted to know'. He then described Labour opinion of the 1920 Home Rule Bill in Ireland, reporting that the

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> John S. Steele to Philip Kerr, 19 Sept 1919, Lothian Papers GD40/17/219/766.

<sup>75</sup> John S. Steele to Philip Kerr, 20 Jan 1920, Lothian Papers GD40/17/219/787; John S. Steele to Philip Kerr, 7 Feb 1920, Lothian Papers GD40/17/219/789.

main concern was with imperial expenditure. Steele hoped that 'through your good offices I will be able to crown the whole trip with an interview with the P.M.'<sup>76</sup>

It appears that Kerr was using Steele, as much as Steele was using Kerr, and it should be noted that Steele was still asking for his interview with Lloyd George in July 1920.<sup>77</sup> But Kerr was more dismissive when Steele went further in trying to mediate with Sinn Féin. After speaking to Arthur Griffith's envoy, Patrick Moylett, in October 1920, Steele asked Kerr to meet with the latter before Moylett's return to Dublin as 'Moylett feels that the situation over there is becoming very critical and fears that the situation may get beyond Griffith's control, in which case it would be useless for him to come back'.<sup>78</sup> The previous chapter discussed Kerr's attitude to Moylett, following C.J. Phillip's discussions with him. Kerr dismissed Steele's intervention, arguing 'I have seen Phillips and I think that on the whole I won't take any steps in the matter for the present. I have no doubt that your friend will see Mr. Phillips when he returns'.<sup>79</sup> Although Kerr tolerated American mediation attempts with Sinn Féin, he did not want to show any willingness on the government's part to meet their demands.

The most interesting case of American mediation involved another journalist. The involvement of Carl W. Ackerman of the *Philadelphia Public Ledger* provides a new perspective on the advice that the British government was receiving during the period concerned. Ackerman was the director of the *Ledger*'s foreign news service in 1919-21. In April 1921 he interviewed Michael Collins at his secret IRA headquarters in Ireland and reported back to Kerr.<sup>80</sup> Kerr trusted the *Ledger* and those associated with it. As he told Lloyd George, the former president William Howard Taft was a

<sup>76</sup> John S. Steele to Philip Kerr, 9 April 1920, Lothian Papers GD40/17/219/793.

<sup>77</sup> John S. Steele to Philip Kerr, 1 July 1920, Lothian Papers GD40/17/219/805.

<sup>78</sup> John S. Steele to Philip Kerr, 27 Oct 1920, Lothian Papers GD40/17/220/805.

<sup>79</sup> Philip Kerr to John S. Steele, 27 Oct 1920, Lothian Papers GD40/17/220/807.

<sup>80</sup> Philip Kerr to Lloyd George, 4 April 1921, Lloyd George Papers F/90/1/41.

member of staff as an editorial contributor, and Colonel House had also contracted a deal to serve as an advisor to the *Ledger*.<sup>81</sup> Ackerman was one of House's journalist friends although Godfrey Hodgson notes that 'House did not necessarily believe their sometimes excited analyses of European politics'.<sup>82</sup> It is possible that it was House who put Ackerman in touch with Kerr.

In 1917 Ackerman came to public notice through his book, *Germany, The Next Republic?*. This explored the potential for democracy in post-war Germany. At the time it was considered quite radical. Ackerman then worked as a correspondent for the *New York Times* with the allied armies in Siberia in 1918-19. He is more widely known, however, for publishing *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in the *Ledger* in 1919. The original text was a hoax document, presented as a series of twenty-four protocols, said to have been created by a secret conclave of Jewish leaders. They were put forward by their sponsors as the authentic blueprint of an age-old Jewish conspiracy to achieve world domination over non-Jews.<sup>83</sup> In Ackerman's version, he replaced all of the references to Jews with references to Bolsheviks and Bolshevism. Before publishing the *Protocols* the latter had contacted the State Department to determine their authenticity. He then decided to publish portions of the first twelve *Protocols*, describing them as being 'written by one of the leaders of the Bolshevik movement for the guidance of the secret council of the soviet'.<sup>84</sup> Ackerman introduced the infamous work to the American public for the first time while the country was in the grip of the 'Red Scare'. Robert Singerman defines this as 'a near-

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<sup>81</sup> Godfrey Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand, The Life of Colonel Edward M. House* (Yale, 2006) p. 261; Philip Kerr to Lloyd George, 4 April 1921, Lloyd George Papers F/90/1/41.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>83</sup> Robert Singerman 'The American Career of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion' in *American Jewish History* (Sept, 1981) p. 48.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.



hysterical nativist fear of radicalism, anarchism, foreign espionage and subversion, and most of all, the specter [sic] of Bolshevism'.<sup>85</sup>

Ackerman was therefore a somewhat controversial character. Kerr, however, probably did not see him this way. As previously noted, he was an acquaintance of Colonel House and was, by all appearances, the foreign correspondent for a reputable paper in the United States. Above all, it seems that Ackerman was in fact employed by the British intelligence services. Papers in the Lothian archive reveal that he was in contact with Basil H. Thomson, who directed British intelligence in Ireland between 1919 and 1921.<sup>86</sup> Thomson recognised the potential value of using an American informant such as Ackerman, rather than English agents. Peter Hart refers to Ackerman as 'the American journalist (and British spy)' and Paul Bew writes that the latter was employed by the 'Anderson Group', a group of Irish and English officials who worked closely with Kerr in the Prime Minister's office to find out if Sinn Féin would stop at anything short of a Republic.<sup>87</sup>

Bew's arguments are convincing. He argues that although historians, such as Sheila Lawlor and Charles Townshend, have acknowledged the significance of the 'Anderson group' they have not grasped the way in which it drove policy, refusing to get knocked off course by the government's hard-line policy. Instead, the group concentrated on bringing about a negotiated outcome that would culminate in the 1921 treaty. He argues that the group had a clear picture of the settlement from the outset and a confidence in their ability to deliver, in the end, the Prime Minister.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>86</sup> See Christopher Andrew, *Secret Service: The Making of the British Intelligence Community* (London, 1985) pp-251-253.

<sup>87</sup> Peter Hart, *Mick: The Real Michael Collins* (London, 2005) p. 293; Paul Bew, 'Moderate Irish Nationalism and the Irish Revolution, 1916-1923' in *The Historical Journal* Vol. 42, No. 3, (Sept, 1999), p. 743-4. See also Paul Bew, *Ireland: The Politics of Enmity 1789-2006* (Oxford, 2007) p. 400.

<sup>88</sup> Paul Bew, 'Moderate Irish Nationalism and the Irish Revolution, 1916-1923', p. 743.

Ackerman first interviewed Collins in the summer of 1920. He then interviewed him again in the spring of 1921. Ackerman's published account of the interviews claimed that Collins had not changed from his earlier stance that Sinn Féin would hold out for a Republic. But according to Ackerman's private report to Basil Thomson about the 1920 interview, Collins had been much more accommodating than the published version suggested.<sup>89</sup> Kerr knew this, as he was in contact with both Ackerman and Thomson. Then, in a memorandum to Lloyd George concerning the 1921 interview, Kerr told the Prime Minister that whereas the previous autumn Sinn Féin had been 'ready to talk some kind of business; now, he said, they were not.'<sup>90</sup> In this latter interview Ackerman had asked Collins if he thought that any purpose could be served if de Valera met Sir James Craig, the leader of the Ulster Unionists, later the first Prime Minister of Northern Ireland. Collins had replied 'I am sure President Devalera [sic.] will meet any Irishman'. Ackerman then added: 'but Collins doubted whether anything could be accomplished so long as Ulster was to be played off against the south of Ireland by the British Cabinet'.<sup>91</sup> Kerr's report to Lloyd George was quite different in tone:

Ackerman asked Collins whether De Valera would meet James Craig with a view to discussing a possible settlement. Michael Collins replied that he did not think there would be any advantage in this and that neither he nor De Valera would meet Craig to discuss a compromise.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Paul Bew 'Collins and Adams, LG and Blair' in *The Spectator*, 31 May 1997; Peter Hart, *Mick: The Real Michael Collins* (London, 2005) p. 293.

<sup>90</sup> Philip Kerr to Lloyd George, 4 April 1921, Lloyd George Papers F/90/1/41.

<sup>91</sup> Carl Ackerman, report of interview with Michael Collins c. March/April 1921, Lloyd George Papers F/90/1/41.

<sup>92</sup> Philip Kerr to Lloyd George, 4 April 1921, Lloyd George Papers F/90/1/41.

This says a great deal about the advice that Kerr was giving Lloyd George in 1921. He first emphasised Ackerman's credibility and then gave the impression that his interview with Collins suggested that Sinn Féin would not negotiate. Kerr told Lloyd George that it was Ackerman's personal view that 'the present situation could not go on; the British Government would either have to capitulate on terms, or fight much harder than at present'.<sup>93</sup> It appears that Kerr was using Ackerman to push for repression. It is possible that it was not until Kerr's departure from Downing Street in late May 1921 that more moderate forces were able to influence Lloyd George to negotiate with Sinn Féin.

There is further evidence to support this argument about Kerr's manipulations. Mark Sturgis at Dublin Castle recorded in his diary on 6 April 1921 that:

After breakfast went over to the CS Lodge on a summons from the Lady. I found her and the CS convinced by a letter from Philip Kerr that all chance of settlement is at the moment dead – that all attempts at negotiation should cease as they convince SF that we are beat. The reason for this is that Ackerman has gone back to Kerr reporting that Michael Collins whom he interviewed is very bobbery [sic.] and has no desire to treat, sure of victory etc.<sup>94</sup>

Kerr was therefore not only influencing Lloyd George, but also Hamar Greenwood, the Chief Secretary for Ireland. Sturgis continued:

At the castle I found a different estimate of the situation. I'm told that the churchmen decided at their meeting yesterday to urge upon SF a 'visit

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Entry in Vol. IV, Tues 5 April 1921, Mark Sturgis, *Last Days of Dublin Castle: The Mark Sturgis Diaries edited and introduced by Michael Hopkinson* (Dublin, 1999) p. 154.

forthwith to Craig'; sent an emissary who returned with the news that after certain preliminaries SF would go.<sup>95</sup>

Sturgis attributed this conflicting information to the fact that 'Ackerman quarrelled with de Valera in America and it is possible they are purposely misleading him'.<sup>96</sup> He did not consider the possibility that Kerr was possibly misinforming Greenwood. Sturgis may have been jealous of Kerr's influence as a fellow civil servant. He had recorded in his diary 21 December 1920 that:

I met Kerr for the first time the other day at the Irish Office; I was not terribly impressed; I seem to have heard so much of this wonder that I was disappointed but a first sight is often deceptive.<sup>97</sup>

But his diary entries indicate that Kerr had greater direct involvement in Irish policy in 1920-21 than historians have previously acknowledged. He was not merely a draftsman of the 1920 Bill.

In relaying his conversation with Ackerman to Lloyd George, Kerr proved once more that he was concerned about public opinion in the United States. He ended his memorandum to the Prime Minister by noting that 'He [Ackerman] finally said he was very anxious that if possible you should give an interview for American public opinion and suggests that you should emphasise 3 points'.<sup>98</sup> These included the argument that there was no distress in Ireland requiring White Cross relief. In her

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Entry in Vol. III, Tues 21 December 1920, Mark Sturgis, *Last Days of Dublin Castle: The Mark Sturgis Diaries edited and introduced by Michael Hopkinson* (Dublin, 1999) p. 96.

<sup>98</sup> Entry in Vol. IV, Tues 5 April 1921, Michael Hopkinson (ed.), *Last Days of Dublin Castle: The Mark Sturgis Diaries* (Dublin, 1999) p. 154.

work, *The Irish Republic*, Dorothy Macardle described economic distress as the 'deadliest weapon' inflicted on the Irish people by her enemies.<sup>99</sup> Macardle was a life-long supporter of de Valera, and on the anti-treaty side during the Irish Civil War. She blamed the 'devastation' in the martial law areas on the military, and the Black and Tans, and for this 'the plundered and starving people were forced to pay'.<sup>100</sup> In response to accounts such as these, the 'American Committee for Relief in Ireland' worked to relieve the burden on the White Cross in Ireland (the equivalent to the British Red Cross). It is thus not surprising that Kerr encouraged the Prime Minister to give an interview to put the record straight. He also told Lloyd George that Ackerman suggested he stress that 'the British Government is fighting, not the Irish people, but a gang of extreme fanatics who are irreconcilable and desperate' and 'that the fundamental issue in Ireland is not one of self-government, but a question of Union versus Secession'.<sup>101</sup> These sound suspiciously like arguments that Kerr would have made himself.

Despite Kerr's increasing reluctance to allow intervention from outsiders he did arrange for Lloyd George to meet with the American Governor of New York, Martin H. Glynn, through the efforts of Ackerman and Basil Thomson. Bew has explained that the meeting between Glynn and the Prime Minister was part of the process referred to as 'the American education of Lloyd George'.<sup>102</sup> Ackerman believed that for peace initiatives to succeed there were necessary preconditions. First, 'The American education of Michael Collins' consisted of informing Collins that the injection of American support for his cause would never materialise. Second, Lloyd

<sup>99</sup> Dorothy Macardle, *The Irish Republic, A Documented Chronicle of the Anglo-Irish Conflict and the Partitioning of Ireland, with a Detailed Account of the Period 1916-1923* (New York, 1965) 1<sup>st</sup> American Edn, 1<sup>st</sup> published 1937. p. 434.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Philip Kerr to Lloyd George, 4 April 1921, Lloyd George Papers F/90/1/41.

<sup>102</sup> Paul Bew 'Collins and Adams, LG and Blair' in *The Spectator*, 31 May 1997.

George's 'American education'. This was more complex as the aim was to persuade him that he could deal with Sinn Féin 'moderates' rather than its well known 'gunmen'. The figure credited with influencing him in this respect was Martin Glynn of Albany, a Democratic politician and newspaper editor.<sup>103</sup> Glynn's parents were Irish immigrants and he remained extremely proud of his Irish ancestry. The library in the New York State village of Valatie, where Glynn grew up, hails him as the 'Father of the Irish Free State' as the result of his meetings with Lloyd George and mediation between the British government and the Sinn Féin leaders in 1921.

Bew writes that although Lloyd George initially refused to see Glynn 'On 5 May [1921] Philip Kerr...set up an "accidental" meeting between the two men at the House of Commons and an intense three hour discussion ensued'.<sup>104</sup> One might question why Kerr would arrange for Lloyd George to encounter Glynn when he seemed to be opposed to the Prime Minister meeting Sinn Féin moderates. The clues are in the letters sent to him by both Thomson and Ackerman, asking him to arrange the meeting. On 3 May 1921 the former wrote to Kerr asking him to see Ackerman on an urgent matter as Glynn was in London. He told Kerr that 'he is one of the 4 or 5 big men who set up the Irish loans in America and he is in a position to cut off the supplies that keep Dail Eirean [sic.] going'.<sup>105</sup> This would have no doubt persuaded Kerr at least to discuss the matter with Ackerman as Kerr was concerned about the financing of Sinn Féin by America. Thomson added:

[Glynn] told Ackerman that if he could be assured that the British Govt is ready to grant certain terms short of a Republic, he would undertake to bring

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Basil Thomson to Philip Kerr, 3 May 1921, Lothian Papers GD40/17/80/263.

back with him other influential Irish Americans and put pressure on the Sinn Feiners to stop all murders and accept the conditions.<sup>106</sup>

Kerr did meet with Ackerman the next morning but there is reason to suggest that he was not fully persuaded. Ackerman wrote to him later that day saying:

There is one point I may not have made clear this morning: Mr. Glynn does not intend to go to Ireland. He did not consider an Irish trip at all until I asked him to go over with me. I think he would prefer not to go. As to Mr. Glynn himself I think you know he is the man who nominated Mr. Wilson for the Presidency in 1916 in St. Louis and made the famous speech: 'he kept us out of the war'.<sup>107</sup>

The idea that Glynn could cut off financial assistance to Sinn Féin, and the fact that he initially had no intention of visiting Ireland directly to intervene, more than likely persuaded Kerr that there was no harm in him meeting Lloyd George. Equally, Kerr may have felt reassured that Glynn had been a supporter of Anglophile President Wilson. In any event, it was a crucial encounter. Bew writes that:

Glynn impressed upon the prime minister the seriousness and earnestness of the Irish, the power of the Irish movement in America, and the importance of the Anglo-Irish peace as the basis for an Anglo-American understanding. The

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Carl W. Ackerman to Philip Kerr, 4 May 1921, Lothian Papers GD40/17/80/265.



prime minister responded by asking Glynn to convey an invitation to the Sinn Féin leadership to attend a peace conference in London.<sup>108</sup>

This was likely Kerr's last official act in relation to the role of the United States in the Irish Question, as he left his position as Lloyd George's secretary at the end of May. Ironically, in arranging the meeting with Glynn, Kerr opened the door for the government's negotiations with Sinn Féin, something that he had been largely opposed to over the previous two years.

The American dimension of the Irish question is a theme that runs throughout modern Anglo-Irish history, just as there was a United States theme in Kerr's life and career. His link with American involvement in Ireland between 1919 and 1921 throws light on the British government's position during the period. At the time Kerr did not have the experience of the United States and its people that he would later gain as Secretary to the Rhodes Trust, or indeed as Ambassador there in 1940. His acquaintance with Anglophiles, such as President Wilson and Colonel House, at the Paris peace conference no doubt shaped his perceptions of American attitudes to Ireland. Thereafter, Kerr tended to listen to the opinions of isolationist and pro-British Americans, dismissing Irish-American agitation and the appeal of U.S. politicians to the Irish-American voters. He does not appear to have had a wider range of informants who could put across the other dimension of American opinion. Although Kerr was concerned by Sinn Féin campaigning in the United States, his advice to both the Prime Minister and Chief Secretary for Ireland, Hamar Greenwood, was on the basis of information he received from sources such as Ackerman, whose credibility as an informant was questionable. He also seems to have given a partial

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<sup>108</sup> Paul Bew 'Collins and Adams, LG and Blair' in *The Spectator*, 31 May 1997.

view of the intelligence he acquired in order to push his own agenda. Yet his role in facilitating the Lloyd George – Glynn meeting led to the position he had adopted being undermined.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Kerr, Religion and the Irish Question**

The religious theme that runs through this study is the least straightforward and therefore adds the most fascinating dimension to Kerr's involvement with Irish affairs. There are two distinct elements to this: Kerr's own religious background and the religious aspects of the Irish question. As previously discussed, Kerr came from a devoutly Catholic (although from recent vintage), aristocratic family. He was introduced to Christian Science by Nancy Astor in 1914 although he did not officially convert until 1923. In Ireland during this period it was impossible to separate church and politics as the vast majority of the population, being Catholic, looked ultimately to the bishops as their religious leaders. Any intervention by the clergy was therefore important, whether in relation to negotiating a settlement, or in connection with the Anglo-Irish War of 1919-21. Kerr was directly involved in addressing them. He interviewed the Australian prelate, Archbishop Patrick Clune of Perth, during his attempt to mediate with the British government in 1920, and drafted replies on behalf of Lloyd George in 1921 to the Protestant bishops' attack on government policy in Ireland. This chapter is a thematic one that explores the relationship between Kerr, religion and the Irish question.

Kerr was becoming deeply submerged in Christian Science teachings some years before he became Lloyd George's secretary. Although the letters to his parents from South Africa between 1905 and 1909 show him trying to remain dedicated to Catholicism, deep religious doubts had begun to set in following his return home. He leant on Nancy Astor for support during this time and considered seeing a Christian

Science practitioner to help him in dealing with his mother's devastation over his doubts. Kerr told Astor that he believed Lady Anne's reaction was not due to worry for her son but to 'the roots of her own life' having been torn up. Indeed, Kerr's faith in the teachings was such that he believed his mother would also one day find 'the truth' herself.<sup>1</sup> During his convalescence from an operation to remove his appendix in 1914, he became more deeply immersed in his newly found faith as he devoured the teachings of its founder, Mary Baker Eddy. His letters to Astor during this period are full of enthusiasm and a sense of elation at the material he was reading. Two years later Kerr's commitment to Christian Science teachings had clearly not waned and continued to cause his family distress. He acknowledged this in a letter to his mother in 1916:

Dearest Mother, don't think that I don't know how you are troubled and suffering... You know I would do anything to spare you both, except deny the teaching of our Lord, and fail in the work which God wishes me to do.<sup>2</sup>

He did assure her, however, that he had no plans to join a Christian Science Church, only to see where the teachings may lead.

Although it would be very tempting to suggest that the experience of Anglo-Irish politics pushed Kerr towards his official conversion to Christian Science in 1923, the evidence suggests that he was following these teachings long before he entered Lloyd George's service. John Turner has noted that Kerr's doubts over the sincerity of the Irish resistance movement were attributed by Horace Plunkett to his 'dislike of the

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Kerr to Nancy Astor, Undated [January 1914], Nancy Astor Papers MS1416/1/4/47.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Kerr to Lady Anne Kerr, 4 May 1916, Lothian Papers GD40/17/465/30.

Catholic Church arising from his recent conversion to Christian Science'.<sup>3</sup> This seems unlikely considering the fact that Kerr had not yet officially converted and he and his family were longstanding Catholics. Plunkett may have been influenced by the fact that Kerr visited a Christian Science church while staying with him at his home near Dublin in 1916. Kerr wrote to Nancy Astor soon afterwards, pleading 'Don't talk about Sir H. Plunkett and C.S. for the present: It would only make trouble for him'.<sup>4</sup> It is possible that 'C.S.' may have also been an abbreviation for 'Chief Secretary', but Kerr often referred to Christian Science as 'C.S.' in his letters to her.

Moreover, although Kerr appeared to have been convinced by Christian Science teachings in 1914, it did not mean that he distanced himself from his Catholic upbringing and Catholic connections. He did not simply cut the cord overnight. In October 1914 he had written to Cardinal Gasquet in Rome in relation to the Round Table's statement on the 'White Book', produced by Sir Edward Grey, defending Britain's entry into the First World War. Gasquet was an English Benedictine, and Archivist of the Holy Roman Church, who had been made a cardinal in May 1914.<sup>5</sup> Kerr had also told him of his brother David's death and Gasquet sent his condolences to Kerr's parents and promised to offer a mass for David's soul.<sup>6</sup> The fascinating aspect of Gasquet's reply is that we have direct evidence here of Kerr having used Catholic contacts in both a spiritual and a political sense. Kerr had most likely met Gasquet either through his parents or Wilfrid Ward. The former may have been moving away from Catholicism yet Catholic figures that he had known, such as Gasquet, were still of importance to him.

<sup>3</sup> John Turner and Michael Dockrill 'Philip Kerr in Downing Street' in John Turner (ed) *The Larger Idea, Lord Lothian and the Problem of National Sovereignty* (London, 1988) p. 36.

<sup>4</sup> Philip Kerr to Nancy Astor, 27 Nov 1916, Nancy Astor Papers MS1416/1/4/49.

<sup>5</sup> Shane Leslie wrote a biography of Gasquet *Cardinal Gasquet, A Memoir* (London, 1953).

<sup>6</sup> Cardinal Gasquet to Philip Kerr, 27 Oct 1914, Lothian Papers GD40/17/3/244.

Dermot Keogh has explained that Gasquet was ‘the ecclesiastic “most responsible” for organising British diplomatic initiatives against Ireland’ and that he was ‘no admirer of Irish nationalism’.<sup>7</sup> Indeed his biographers have noted that he was ‘John-Bullish’ in his manner.<sup>8</sup> Reference is also made to his love of ‘Irish’ jokes. Gasquet was involved in efforts to persuade the British of the need for a diplomatic representative at the Vatican in 1914, and in reference to Britain’s entry into the war, told Kerr ‘what I hope will come out of the situation is that the English authorities will see the folly of not having a proper representative at the Vatican’.<sup>9</sup> Sir Henry Howard, a distant relative of Kerr, was subsequently sent to Rome in order to provide a more formal British presence, although he was not an official representative of the crown. It would have been advantageous to the government to maintain strong relations with the Vatican, particularly in view of the Irish situation. It was believed by nationalist Irish clerics, such as John Hagan and Michael Curran, that the Vatican was possessed by ‘an anglophile and anti-Irish spirit’.<sup>10</sup> Pope Leo XIII was thought to be pro-English because he was impressed by the liberal attitude towards Catholics there and he had a long-term desire to achieve the conversion of England. Hagan insisted that this attitude continued under Benedict XV when the Pope ‘could not look with a very favourable eye on Irish turbulence such as it was sedulously presented to him’.<sup>11</sup> There was therefore a marked difference between Irish Catholicism at the Vatican and Irish nationalism.

It was however impossible to separate religion from politics when it came to the Irish question, not only because the matter itself was essentially a religious one, but

<sup>7</sup> Dermot Keogh, *The Vatican, The Bishops and Irish Politics 1919-39* (Cambridge, 1986) p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Dominic Aidan Bellenger, ‘Gasquet, Francis Neil (1846–1929)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, May 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Cardinal Gasquet to Philip Kerr, 27 Oct 1914, Lothian Papers GD40/17/3/244.

<sup>10</sup> Dermot Keogh, *The Vatican, The Bishops and Irish Politics 1919-39* (Cambridge, 1986) p. 14.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Dermot Keogh, *The Vatican, The Bishops and Irish Politics 1919-39*, p. 14.

also because the Irish bishops were not reluctant to become involved in political matters. The war of 1914-18, and its aftermath, put a new slant on this issue as there was the question of Irish loyalty to the Empire, and the opinions of the Irish clergy potentially had a greater impact on the government's handling of Irish matters. There is a considerable literature on this subject, one of the classics being David Miller's *Church, State and Nation in Ireland 1898-1921*, along with Dermot Keogh's *The Vatican, The Bishops and Irish Politics 1919-39*.<sup>12</sup> Keogh in particular has explored the role and influence of the Catholic hierarchy in Anglo-Irish politics during this period. But political involvement by the Irish clergy particularly antagonised Kerr. It also annoyed members of his family. During the conscription crisis of 1918, Kerr's uncles on both sides, Lord Edmund Talbot and Lord Walter Kerr, joined forces with other members of the Catholic Union in a resolution condemning the Irish Catholic bishops for resisting the introduction of conscription in Ireland.<sup>13</sup> This demonstrates some continuity in the family's stance, as Henry Fitzalan-Howard and Lord Ralph Kerr had opposed Gladstone's second Home Rule Bill in 1893 as members of the British Catholic Unionists.

Kerr was also frustrated by the Irish bishops' response to the conscription controversy. In his *Round Table* article, entitled 'The Irish Crisis', he described how Irish Nationalist leaders took their grievances over conscription immediately to the bishops assembled at Maynooth.<sup>14</sup> The bishops summoned the politicians and then issued a statement declaring that 'conscription forced in this way upon Ireland is an impressive and inhuman law, which the Irish people have a right to resist by all the

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<sup>12</sup> David W. Miller, *Church, State and Nation in Ireland 1898-1921* (Dublin, 1973); Dermot Keogh, *The Vatican, The Bishops and Irish Politics 1919-39* (Cambridge, 1986).

<sup>13</sup> Mark Bence-Jones, *The Catholic Families* p. 274.

<sup>14</sup> [Philip Kerr], 'The Irish Crisis' in *The Round Table* No. 31 (June 1918) p. 517.



means that are consonant with the law of God'.<sup>15</sup> Not only did Cardinal Logue and the bishops express their opposition to conscription in Ireland, they also took it a step further when they issued a declaration pledging their resistance to it. They stated that they would resist conscription by the most effective means at their disposal and planned collections 'for the purpose of supplying means to resist the imposition of compulsory military service'.<sup>16</sup> Although Kerr acknowledged that the bishops' pledge may have been in order to restrain violence, he believed it ultimately demonstrated that they were the most important political power in Ireland. In doing so, he suggested that the bishops had played directly into Ulster's hands, as the Protestant minority would certainly refuse to submit to the rule of a Catholic majority which had proved that its political life was mainly controlled by the clergy.<sup>17</sup>

As a result of the clerical intervention in the conscription crisis, Kerr became more convinced that the involvement of religious bodies created a barrier to solving the Irish problem. A later *Round Table* article, 'The Harvest of Victory' in 1919, explored the future of the British Commonwealth in the post-war world.<sup>18</sup> Ireland, he argued, was the greatest hindrance to the growth of mutual understanding between English-speaking peoples at that time. He contended that the problem could not be solved by giving into extreme Irish agitation. In his view, its combination of clericalism, Bolshevism, and racialism, made it one of the most reactionary forces in the world. Yet Kerr was greatly disappointed that the editor, Reginald Coupland, had chosen to leave out a key sentence in the Irish section that subsequently made the passage 'almost pointless'. Kerr wrote:

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 518.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 518-9.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 521.

<sup>18</sup> [Philip Kerr], 'The Harvest of Victory' in *The Round Table* No. 36 (Sept 1919).

The one thing I wanted to point out was that the root of the trouble in Ireland is that the population is under clerical control. Until somebody has the courage to say that we shall never settle the problem. We have tried to settle it on a purely social and political basis for 30 years and have invariably failed because at the last minute religious animosities overpower political reason, as they always will wherever they are really strong.<sup>19</sup>

Kerr's stance over this issue actually places him in unison with English Catholicism rather than being the attitude of someone who had left the Catholic Church. Furthermore, his connection between Irish nationalism and Bolshevism was similar to Vatican fears that Bolshevism had influenced the radical nationalists in Ireland. Although Kerr was following Christian Science teachings at this time, he remained influenced by his elite Catholic upbringing and his early influences. His grievances were with the Irish clergy and not the 'Catholic Church' in general. He believed that church and state in Ireland should be separate. In his letter to Coupland, Kerr stated emphatically that:

If we are ever to settle the Irish problem we must face that central fact, not by preaching a religious war, but by insisting as liberalism has always done throughout its history in the world, that religion must be kept out of politics. Religion lies at the bottom of politics in Ireland, and at every crisis it is the Bishops at Maynooth which fundamentally determine the political action of the Irish people. I think to have said this clearly now would have been a real help in dealing with the Irish problem. I am perfectly certain it is no use

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<sup>19</sup> Philip Kerr to Reginald Coupland, 23 Aug 1919, Lothian Papers GD40/17/490.

blethering about constitutions and liberty and closing our eyes to the fundamentals of the situation, and I am sorry that the Round Table has decided to camouflage these fundamentals.

Kerr added that he would have had no objection to adding a corresponding sentence 'calling upon the Ulstermen to refrain from religious animosity and Carsonism'. He explained:

Ulsterism and Carsonism like the violence of atheism and radicalism in France, Spain and Italy are really the consequences of political control exercised by a great religious organisation. What matters most of all, therefore, to my judgement is pointing out that the situation will never get straight in Ireland except as the result of the complete ending of the interference of religious organisations in politics, whether organisations are Roman Catholic or Protestant.<sup>20</sup>

In one respect Kerr was right to acknowledge the fundamental issue of religion in Irish politics. On the other hand, however, he was perhaps rather naïve in thinking that the two could be kept separate. Kerr seems to have been making the point that the situation in Ireland had not been solved politically because of the interference of the church and the fact that the people looked to the clergy as their leaders. In reality the political issue was in fact a religious one. As the majority of the population were Catholics the issue of self-government was the Protestant minority's fear of 'Rome

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

rule'. Although it may seem that, as a Catholic, Kerr should have understood this, he might not have identified with it in the same way. As a member of the Catholic aristocracy, his Catholicism would have been in a more 'elevated' form to that of its Irish counterpart and would not have encroached on political life in the way that the Catholic Church did in Ireland. Kerr does not seem to have fully recognised the role that religion played in all aspects of Irish life.<sup>21</sup> His early experiences there may have cemented this view. Although his parents had actively engaged in religious life in Ireland, they maintained their Unionist and imperial political views.

Kerr would face this religious question while acting as secretary to the committee that devised the Government of Ireland Bill. Religion would come into the Irish settlement at every level, whether this concerned the wider implications of self-government or the more precise details such as education under a Home Rule scheme. One would assume that with regard to education, for example, no-one would have understood the problems more than Kerr. He had, after all, received a Catholic education himself in accordance with the wishes of his family. Stephen Gwynn wrote to Kerr in November 1919 concerning the matter of denominational education. The former believed that there would be less opposition to a separate Ulster government if denominational education was guaranteed.<sup>22</sup> Equally, Kerr had been informed by a Mr. Hannon that an essential point for the Irish bishops was that they were guaranteed control over the education of their own flock.<sup>23</sup>

The involvement of the Irish bishops went deeper than this issue, however. It has been noted by historians Nicholas Mansergh and Alvin Jackson that the Cabinet Committee on Ireland wanted the partition of the nine counties of Ulster rather than

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<sup>21</sup> Philip Kerr to Lady Anne Kerr, 11 May 1907, Lothian Papers GD40/17/456/23.

<sup>22</sup> Stephen Gwynn to Philip Kerr, 18 Nov 1919, Lothian Papers GD40/17/609/1.

<sup>23</sup> Philip Kerr, Memo, 3 Dec 1919, Lothian Papers GD40/17/591.

only six.<sup>24</sup> Although ultimately they gave in to the pressure of the Ulster Unionists' demand for a six county partition, it was allegedly also the wish of the Catholic hierarchy that only the six counties of Ulster remained under British control. There are documents in Kerr's papers from James O'Connor, a Lord Justice who had apparently talked with members of the Irish hierarchy, Cardinal Michael Logue of Armagh, Archbishop William Walsh of Dublin, Patrick O'Donnell the Bishop of Raphoe and Joseph Cardinal MacRory the Bishop of Down and Connor, which put forward their preference for a six county partition rather than the whole of Ulster.<sup>25</sup> The bishops were in fact looking after their own interests in this regard. In doing so, they could ensure greater control, geographically, over their diocese. They were not necessarily considering the long term interests of the country. As secretary to Lloyd George, and in particular the government's Irish Committee, Kerr had first hand access to this information and was therefore fully aware of the Irish Catholic clergy's stance on the 1920 Bill.

Kerr's connections with the religious elements of the Irish question were not only in relation to the drafting of the Bill during this period. As events in Ireland became more serious throughout 1920 and 1921, there was intervention from religious bodies in an attempt to mediate and to protest at the government's policy in Ireland. In this regard, Kerr's involvement included an interview with the Australian prelate, Archbishop Patrick Joseph Clune, and drafting a reply to a letter from the Protestant bishops in 1921. As previously discussed, by the spring of 1920 the Irish situation was escalating at an alarming rate and the first 'Black and Tans' arrived in order to assist police attempts to control the Irish militants. The British forces continued to

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<sup>24</sup> Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule, An Irish History 1800-2000* (London, 2004) p. 229-230; Nicholas Mansergh, *The Unresolved Question: The Anglo-Irish Settlement and its Undoing, 1912-1972* (London, 1991) p. 128.

<sup>25</sup> James O'Connor to Philip Kerr, 9 Dec 1919, Lothian Papers GD40/17/78/37.

respond to attacks by IRA gunmen, often with brutal reprisals. The Irish secretary, Ian MacPherson, had been replaced by Sir Hamar Greenwood in April, whose prior administrative experience was at the War Office. Miller notes that it was rumoured as late as the end of July that Lloyd George was considering making a deal through the Irish Catholic bishops. He argues, however, that this was unlikely to happen, as the Prime Minister presided over a Cabinet that included three prominent Conservatives most deeply implicated in the Ulster Revolt of 1912-14: Andrew Bonar Law, Walter Long and Lord Birkenhead.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, the situation continued to escalate and the reprisals of the crown forces caused outrage among the Irish clergy. In October 1920 the hierarchy rejected the government's claims that the reprisals were not official policy and stated that 'Outrage has been connived at and encouraged, if not organised, not by obscure and irresponsible individuals but by the government of a mighty Empire, professing the highest ideals of truth and justice'.<sup>27</sup> The bishops went further in denouncing 'the iniquity of furnishing a corner of Ulster with a separate government, or its worst instrument, a special police force, to enable it all the more rapidly to trample underfoot the victims of its intolerants'.<sup>28</sup> According to Miller, although the Catholic clergy had also denounced the crimes committed on the Irish side, this would be easily overlooked in the outraged and anti-British rhetoric. He argues that it was easy to conclude that the whole hierarchy had been pushed closer to full sanction of the republic as a result of the violence of the state.<sup>29</sup>

Kerr had been exasperated by the bishops' response to the conscription crisis of 1918; this situation, however was now at a different level altogether. By this stage it was evident that it was impossible for the church to remain detached and objective.

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<sup>26</sup> David W. Miller, *Church, State and Nation in Ireland 1898-1921* (Dublin, 1973) p. 454-5.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in David W. Miller, *Church, State and Nation in Ireland 1898-1921* (Dublin, 1973) p. 455.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 456.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

As the situation was escalating, Robert Brand wrote to his friend Charles Altschul in April 1920:

The Irish question as you know, looks more hopeless than ever. My friend, Philip Kerr, who has good opportunities for knowing, as he was born in a Roman Catholic family and knows the Church very well, regards the fundamental evil as being its influence on the Irish population. He considers it has the same effects as Prussian militarism, namely it robs the individual of his power or wish to think and act independently and therefore enables an oligarchy, whether of Prussian Junkers or Sinn Feiners to drive the mass of the people like sheep either to war or in the case of Ireland to terrorism. There is no healthy public opinion at all. It is quite impossible to say what will happen.<sup>30</sup>

Here we gain further insight into Kerr's thought at the time. His main concern with the Catholic Church in Ireland was clearly the hold that it had on the population and the influence that came with this. It seems that, having moved away from Catholicism, Kerr looked upon the situation as a detached spectator, yet one with inside information. He did not look on this as a problem particular to Ireland, rather that it was an international issue. Perhaps it can be suggested that he failed to recognise the distinctive nature of Catholicism in Ireland that made it different to its counterparts throughout the world.

As noted above, Kerr was directly involved in the mediation attempt by a cleric in 1920. Miller notes that the most promising source of ecclesiastical mediation

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<sup>30</sup> R.H. Brand to Charles Altschul, 7 April 1920, Brand Papers, File 48/1. I am extremely grateful to Professor Priscilla Roberts for this quotation.

involved Irish churchmen from Australia.<sup>31</sup> Both Archbishop Daniel Mannix and Archbishop Clune attempted to use their influence to mediate between the British government and the Irish Nationalists in 1920. There is a considerable amount of literature on the life and work of Mannix, yet not so much specifically about Clune.<sup>32</sup> This is perhaps due to the fact that the former was a more controversial character. Mannix was treated with suspicion by the British government as he was an outspoken champion of Irish national claims. He had led a nationwide campaign against conscription in Australia, and when travelling across the United States had contributed to American agitation for Irish independence. As previously explored, this was something that Kerr was fully aware of.<sup>33</sup> Indeed in July of 1920 the British prevented him from landing in Ireland even though Cardinal Gasquet in Rome appealed to the Prime Minister to use him as an intermediary. Lloyd George, however, was not prepared to take the risk.

Archbishop Clune, on the other hand, was welcomed by Lloyd George as he seems to have genuinely believed that Clune was loyal and would only try to promote peace between Britain and Ireland. Clune had been the senior chaplain to the Catholic members of the Australian Imperial Force during the First World War, and in 1916 had visited troops in England and those in the Ypres salient. It is said that he made a profound impression during these visits.<sup>34</sup> In stark contrast to Mannix and the other Irish bishops, Clune had publicly expressed himself to be in favour of conscription. He would therefore have appeared to be a promising candidate as a mediator. He was a supporter of Home Rule for Ireland and, on his visit to Ireland in 1920, had been

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<sup>31</sup> David W. Miller, *Church, State and Nation in Ireland 1898-1921* (Dublin, 1973) p. 471.

<sup>32</sup> Niall Brennan, *Dr. Mannix* (London, 1965); Michael Gilchrist, *Daniel Mannix, Priest and Patriot* (Blackburn, 1982); B.A. Santamaria, *Daniel Mannix, The Quality of Leadership* (Carlton, 1984).

<sup>33</sup> David W. Miller, *Church, State and Nation in Ireland 1898-1921* p. 472.

<sup>34</sup> D.F. Bourke, 'Clune, Patrick Joseph (1864-1935)', *Australian Dictionary of National Biography*, Online Edition (2006).



horrified by the outrages carried out by the Black and Tans. These experiences led him to call for a truce in order to find a solution. During 1920 Clune travelled between Dublin and London, negotiating between the Cabinet and the Irish leaders. Despite Lloyd George's willingness to come to terms, the Cabinet and the Irish leaders refused to shift over the question of surrendering rebel arms. To surrender arms was unthinkable to the Irish leaders. The die-hard Conservatives of the Cabinet, however, refused to give in and it seemed that the mediation attempt had failed.

It was Kerr that Lloyd George sent to speak with Clune at the end of December in a final attempt to find common ground. This is significant for two reasons. First of all, Kerr was now in contact with the two individuals who Michael Collins had agreed to meet: Clune and Ackerman. Their mediation attempts both went through Kerr. Secondly, Kerr's Catholic connections were probably a factor in Lloyd George sending him to meet with Clune. We only have Kerr's own account of his two interviews with Clune to rely on, and in view of his questionable information to Lloyd George following the meeting with Ackerman, we cannot be certain of their accuracy. They are useful, however, in revealing his attitude. According to Kerr, in his interview on 29 December Clune proposed a truce first of all, and that a meeting of the Dáil should follow, with the leaders present. He explained that although Mannix thought that a truce should include terms of settlement, he himself believed that feeling was too high in Ireland at that time. He suggested that a truce would allow passions to subside, and then a settlement could be reached. Clune argued that 'it would be necessary for all members of the Dail to be allowed to meet if it was to be in a position to negotiate, and he realised the difficulty of that from the British point of

view'.<sup>35</sup> He added that he would like the ban on Archbishop Mannix to be lifted so that he could visit Ireland and assist in bringing about a settlement.<sup>36</sup>

Having submitted Clune's proposals to the government, Kerr met with him again on 31 December. He told him that:

after full discussion the Government did not see its way to go on with the suggestion for a truce which he had submitted to me a couple of days before. I said that the Government felt that there was no real basis for peace unless the Sinn Fein leaders definitely abandoned the campaign of violence by calling for the surrender of all arms to the British Government, or by openly abandoning their demand for a republic and accepting membership of the United Kingdom.<sup>37</sup>

As in the case with Colonel House, Kerr followed up his statement of the government's position by contributing his own point of view: 'speaking purely personally'. He explained to Clune that, as the 1920 Home Rule Act was already on the statute book, the Irish people should seriously consider its value in bringing about reconciliation:

If Ireland would only repudiate the impossible ideals of Sinn Fein and put an end to violence and work the Act, they could have a Government of their own in office within a very few months with wider powers than had ever been conceived by the greatest leaders of Irish opinion.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Philip Kerr to Lloyd George, 29 Dec 1920, Lothian Papers GD40/17/627/1.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Philip Kerr to Lloyd George, 31 Dec 1920, Lothian Papers GD40/17/627/2.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

He acknowledged that there would be two parliaments instead of one but argued that this was merely a recognition of the facts as the population of Ulster was just as determined to resist the rule of Dublin as the rest of Ireland was the rule of Westminster. Kerr used the example of South Africa in which, following a long and bitter struggle:

General Botha had abandoned the Dutch and accepted the British flag, and within four years had become Prime Minister of the Transvaal, and within seven years Prime Minister of United South Africa. I thought if Ireland accepted and worked the Bill we would reach the same ultimate result in the case of Ireland also.<sup>39</sup>

This illustrates two things. Kerr was absolutely convinced that the 1920 Home Rule Bill should be given a chance to work. He had drafted it and according to Hankey, had been the originator of the scheme. Kerr did not envisage a scheme that would improve on the Bill until it had been tested. Secondly, he continued to be influenced by his earlier career and drew parallels between Ireland and other parts of the Empire. Kerr failed to see Ireland as a separate case. Clune had criticised the Bill as inadequate on account of partition and referred to the British government's determination 'to tyrannise over Ireland'. Yet Kerr insisted that:

this was certainly not the intention but that the Government thought that the kindest way out was to settle the fundamental issue beyond question now, and

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

then through the Bill which was an honest and fair proposal to bring about a reconciliation.<sup>40</sup>

According to Art O'Brien in a letter to Michael Collins, Kerr had suggested to Clune that the Irish hierarchy should step in and effect a settlement.<sup>41</sup> This, of course, would have been a settlement to Kerr's liking, based on the already existent Home Rule Act. O'Brien reported Clune's reply that although the hierarchy would be willing to meet Dáil Éireann, they would not be prepared to usurp its functions as a National Assembly. Although Kerr's contact with figures such as Clune, Ackerman, or indeed House, was as an agent and a spokesman for the government, it is entirely possible that he may have convinced Collins of the strength of the government's resistance to extreme nationalist demands through expressing his personal opinion on the situation.

Kerr's biographers have made references to his interviews with Clune; none, however, have gone into much detail in regard to his role in this episode. John Turner notes that as these negotiations were of great delicacy they were entrusted to Kerr because Lloyd George and Hamar Greenwood could rely on him to respond in the 'right way' to points made by the other side.<sup>42</sup> Turner also points out that, although Kerr's role was that of an agent rather than a principal, he was well suited to it due to his belief that the government was right to use force in denying the demands of Sinn Féin for separate nationhood.<sup>43</sup> But we should also not ignore Kerr's religious affiliations. It is highly likely that Kerr's Catholic background was a bonus for the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Art O'Brien to Michael Collins, 25 Dec 1920, *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy*, [www.difp.ie/docs/Volume1/1920/128.htm](http://www.difp.ie/docs/Volume1/1920/128.htm).

<sup>42</sup> John Turner and Michael Dockrill 'Philip Kerr in Downing Street' in John Turner (ed) *The Larger Idea, Lord Lothian and the Problem of National Sovereignty* (London, 1988) p.38.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

Prime Minister in sending him to speak with Clune. Kerr's Catholic background may, in turn, have made a difference for Clune, as it did for others.

Indeed, his connections with the Irish Catholic clergy were greater than the record suggests. On hearing of Kerr's death in 1940 Bishop Michael Fogarty of Killaloe sent a letter of condolence to his family. The latter had narrowly escaped an assassination attempt by Black and Tans during the Anglo-Irish War. He supported Clune's mediation attempt in 1920 and had travelled to Dublin to meet with Clune on the night that the raid was carried out on his home. Keogh explains that 'The incident did little to endear the British to the moderate Fogarty. Even the mildest of Irish bishops had been alienated by the lawlessness of the authorities'.<sup>44</sup> As a result, he went on to become one of the most politically active of the Irish bishops during the Treaty debates of 1921-22. Fogarty was firmly pro-Treaty and, in later years, found it difficult to forget de Valera's anti-Treaty campaign. In his condolence letter to Dorothy Kerr in 1940 he wrote:

I had...with profound regret read of Lord Lothian's death, nor have I failed to commend his soul to the mercy of God, and that for his own sake and for the sake of his most excellent mother, who I believe is now in heaven, after her most edifying life on earth, and what I write of his mother is true also, of his noble father. As I write this, the living figures of both of them come back to me, as they looked and walked so many years ago, the admiration of all in Kildare.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Dermot Keogh, *The Vatican, The Bishops and Irish Politics 1919-39* (Cambridge, 1986) p. 65.

<sup>45</sup> Bishop Michael Fogarty to Mother Dorothy Kerr, 16 Dec 1940, Private Collection, Monteviot House, Brown Envelope Labelled 'Philip Lothian, Letters of Condolence, Personal to Family'.

This reveals a link that has not been previously explored. It indicates that members of the Irish Catholic hierarchy were fully aware of Kerr's role in 1916-21. It is possible that Fogarty encouraged Clune's mediation through Kerr in 1920, or perhaps he placed confidence in Clune's attempt because Fogarty had known Kerr's family in former years.

Although Kerr may have attempted to keep his religious life, and also his religious background, separate from his work, there were instances when this must have been almost impossible for him. As the previous chapter noted, in February 1920 Louis Tracy of the British Bureau of Information in New York wrote to Lloyd George about the activities of the Sinn Féin organisation in the United States.<sup>46</sup> In particular, Tracy was concerned about the assistance provided by the Catholic Church authorities to the Sinn Féin activists. He claimed that the Sinn Féin agitation was one of the many tentacles that the Roman Church was putting out to ensure a firmer grip on the world.<sup>47</sup> Tracy informed the Prime Minister that the Carmelite order played a key role in assisting the Sinn Féiners, either by sheltering them or by conveying information from the United States to the leaders in Ireland. This information was accurate as Keogh has commented on the role of the Carmelite Friary in New York in providing temporary accommodation for Sinn Féiners who had recently arrived in the United States.<sup>48</sup> He describes it as a centre of political activity, where Liam Mellows, Sean Nunan, Harry Boland and Eamon de Valera were frequent visitors. Tracy referred to these individuals in his letters. He seemed to be under the impression that it was the Church's belief that, should De Valera and his associates succeed in their goal of an Irish republic, then Roman Catholic doctrine would become more dominant

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<sup>46</sup> Louis Tracy to Lloyd George, 24 Feb 1920, Lothian Papers GD40/17/78/75.

<sup>47</sup> Louis Tracy to Lloyd George, 24 Feb 1920, Lothian Papers GD40/17/78/80.

<sup>48</sup> Dermot Keogh, *The Vatican, The Bishops and Irish Politics 1919-39* (Cambridge, 1986) p. 19.

as a result. It is difficult to imagine that Tracy's advice to Lloyd George would not have impacted on Kerr. Indeed Tracy wrote:

I would urge most strongly that during the present crisis the Government should not place too great reliance on public servants who are Irish Catholics, or even Catholics. This is a hard thing to say, after the splendid record set up by English Catholicism during the war, but the fact remains that, as a religion, it is a very close corporation, and that its members may range in sympathy from intense loyalty to the British Crown to open disaffection.<sup>49</sup>

Tracy further counselled the Prime Minister that:

Rome has her agents in every section of society, and it is not asking too much that the predominant partners of the British Empire should assume the responsibilities of leadership and effort among their own ranks to the exclusion of members of a religion which was undoubtedly opposed to us during the war in its official and corporate form.<sup>50</sup>

In view of the fact that these letters from Tracy went through Kerr as the Prime Minister's secretary, it must have been wounding for him to read advice of this nature. Although the evidence shows that Kerr moved away from the Catholic faith long before 1920, he had formerly adhered to that church and his family remained devout Catholics. There does not appear to be any record of Kerr's response to Tracy's letter, but one can only assume that opinions of this nature would make him very

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<sup>49</sup> Louis Tracy to Lloyd George, 24 Feb 1920, Lothian Papers GD40/17/78/80.

<sup>50</sup> Louis Tracy to Lloyd George, 24 Feb 1920, Lothian Papers GD40/17/78/81.

conscious of his Catholic background. It is also just possible that Kerr's experience of the Catholic Church's role in Irish affairs could have pushed him further in the direction of Christian Science, or indeed confirmed his decision.

By April 1921 the situation in Ireland was not improving and the clergy continued in their efforts to speak out against the government's handling of it. This was not restricted to the Catholic clergy as in early April John Edwin, the Bishop of Chelmsford, along with nineteen other leading Protestants wrote to Lloyd George about the situation in Ireland. The letter was written following a protest in the House of Lords by Randall Thomas Davidson, the Archbishop of Canterbury, against reprisals by the crown forces in Ireland. Other Protestant churches took his lead and wrote to the Prime Minister. They argued that the 'outrages' that had given rise to the British reprisals could not be considered criminal acts in the ordinary sense, as they were the result of long and deep-rooted political grievance.<sup>51</sup> Further to this, they claimed that the recent Government of Ireland Act had failed to appease these grievances. There is little doubt that the letter expressed sympathy with the Irish cause. Ultimately, it called for a change in government policy and a truce with a view to finding an agreed solution. Kerr was commissioned to draft a reply to the letter, restating and defending the government's Irish policy to the bishops. He would not have approved of their intervention. To deal with the involvement of the Catholic clergy, Irish or other, was one thing but for the leaders of the Protestant denominations to intervene was quite another. Such an intervention was potentially disastrous for the government.

Kerr's reply was printed for wide circulation. The Irish Secretary, Hamar Greenwood, was keen that the government's policy was publicised through this reply

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<sup>51</sup> Bishop of Chelmsford to Lloyd George, 3 April 1921, Lloyd George Papers F/96/1/17/81-4.



as such a document would receive a world wide readership.<sup>52</sup> The reply, entitled *The Prime Minister on 'Reprisals'. A Reply to the Bishop of Chelmsford*, addressed the points made by the bishops in their letter to Lloyd George.<sup>53</sup> Kerr dealt with the bishops' arguments under various headings, beginning with 'The Policy of "Reprisals"'. The document stated that there were no 'irregular forces' of the Crown, as the bishops had claimed. Rather, it was explained that the Auxiliary Division of the Royal Irish Constabulary was a regular force that had been formed following the brutal assassinations of policemen in July 1920. Kerr (in the Prime Minister's name) argued that any authorisation or condoning of unchecked violence in response to attacks was untrue. Although there was an acknowledgement of the need for further discipline of the Auxiliaries, it was argued that this was improving as the force consolidated. Kerr made particular reference to the bishops' statement that the outrages committed in Ireland were due to a deep-seated sense of political grievance. He pointed out that whilst the bishops were emphatic in condemning the government, they went on practically to condone the Sinn Féin adoption of murder as a weapon on the ground that the end justified the means. In response Kerr wrote: 'It seems to me that this part of your resolution is subversive alike of order and good government, morality and the Christian religion'.<sup>54</sup>

In defending the government's policy, Kerr described the contrasting approaches of both Sinn Féin and His Majesty's government as irreconcilable, and instead focused on the merits of the Home Rule Act. He argued that the establishment of two parliaments was the only practical solution and that:

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<sup>52</sup> Hamar Greenwood to Philip Kerr, 13 April 1921, Lloyd George Papers F/19/3/12.

<sup>53</sup> *Matters of Moment for the Million* 'The Prime Minister on "Reprisals". A Reply to the Bishop of Chelmsford', 18 April 1921, Lloyd George Papers F/96/1/25.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

The present Home Rule Act is a sensible and workmanlike method of carrying this policy into effect. It confers on Ireland wider powers than either Gladstone's Bills or the Act of 1914. It bases the financial relations of the two countries on relative taxable capacity, and leaves to Irishmen themselves the task of achieving unity within their own land.<sup>55</sup>

Kerr referred to the American Civil War, pointing out that the struggle in Ireland was not about the Home Rule Act but rather the issue between secession and union. In discussing the conditions of settlement, he was emphatic in stating that the government would never give way regarding the fundamental question of secession. He suggested, in conclusion, that the signatories would agree with the position set forth in the reply. In view of the influence that the clergy had, Kerr appealed to them to make their position clear to the people of Ireland by clarifying the fact that they could never achieve their ends by resorting to crime, that secession was impossible, and that Ulster must be granted the same rights they claimed for themselves.

Kerr's reply became almost an official statement of the government's stance on Ireland and was used as the standard reply to any enquiries or protests. At Lloyd George's request, Kerr sent copies to Auckland Geddes in America suggesting that 'you should take special steps to communicate this to important people of the administration in Washington and also to the more thoughtful people of the Journals in the United States'.<sup>56</sup> In addition to this, he sent a copy to the 'New Catholic Press' asking that it be printed, presumably with the aim of targeting its Catholic readership in Britain. The response to his request shines new light not only on Kerr's connection with the Irish question, but also on the contemporary attitudes towards him in Ireland.

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>56</sup> Philip Kerr to Sir Auckland Geddes, 21 April 1921, Lothian Papers GD40/17/79/258.

The reply that he received from a 'C. Diamond' was not only scathing in its attack on Lloyd George but ended with a verbal assault on Kerr himself. Diamond referred to the Prime Minister's statement as a 'defence of his murder policy in Ireland' and answered Kerr's request to publish it noting 'we decline to soil our columns with the lies and mis-statements of all kinds with which the proffered contribution reeks'.<sup>57</sup> He went on:

I look upon the Prime Minister as just as much a murderer and assassin, as if his hands were dripping with the blood of the victims who have been murdered by minions, by his direct incitement....To-day we despise him not for himself, because he is beneath contempt, but we despise him for the work he is doing, for his scoundrelly apostasy from all the causes he formally championed, now that he is the pride of the Tories of the country, and the chief of the 'Black and Tans' in Ireland. We leave him to that hell which his conscience must have created in him, if he really has a conscience.<sup>58</sup>

Diamond concluded his assault by directly condemning Kerr: 'You are a Catholic or you are supposed to be a Catholic. That you should be paid hireling for such dirty work, is a disgrace to you and the religion you profess'.<sup>59</sup>

Charles Diamond was an Irish press baron who produced a number of popular newspapers that supported Irish nationalism.<sup>60</sup> It has been said that he was 'the single

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<sup>57</sup> Charles Diamond to Philip Kerr, 29 April 1921, Lothian Papers GD40/17/80/259.

<sup>58</sup> Charles Diamond to Philip Kerr, 29 April 1921, Lothian Papers GD40/17/80/259.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Joan Allen 'Diamond, Charles (1858-1934)' in Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (eds.), *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism* (London, 2009) p. 166.

greatest influence on Scottish Catholic journalism' in the nineteenth century.<sup>61</sup> Born in Maghera, County Derry in 1858, Diamond had moved to England at the age of twenty and ran a newspaper in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. He went on to build an empire of which the 'New Catholic Press Ltd' was his controlling company. Diamond's obituary credited him with forty such publications, thirty-seven of which were still in existence at the time of his death.<sup>62</sup> His paper, *The Irish Tribune: An Irish Journal for England and Scotland*, was intended to be cheap enough for even the poorest of readers. Between 1884 and 1885 the paper expanded to target the Irish communities in Newcastle, Glasgow, Liverpool, Manchester and London. The *Tribune* claimed to reach four million Irish and Catholic people in England and Scotland. Diamond also took over the struggling *Glasgow Observer*, purchasing it outright in 1894 and making it the Scottish sister paper to the *Tribune*.

Having established himself as an ambitious and rising press baron in the 1880s, Diamond pursued a political career in the 1890s, winning the parliamentary seat of North Monaghan in 1892, a position he held for three years. It was, however, an unfortunate time to have done so as Irish politics fragmented following Parnell's death. Diamond had denounced Parnell on Catholic moral grounds during the O'Shea divorce case. In the wake of the latter's death, Diamond was then rapidly drawn into violent quarrels among the anti-Parnellites and did not stand for the seat again in 1895. Instead, he used his papers as an outlet to support Irish nationalism. In the years following the Easter Rising of 1916 Diamond had originally been hostile to de Valera and to the heirs of the insurgents. He grew increasingly unhappy with John Redmond, however, and moved towards Sinn Féin. Owen Dudley Edwards has explained that Diamond must have found Redmond highly conservative in light of his

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<sup>61</sup> Owen Dudley Edwards 'The Catholic Press in Scotland Since the Restoration of the Hierarchy' in David McRoberts (ed.), *Modern Scottish Catholicism 1878-1978* (Glasgow, 1979) p. 169.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

memories of Davitt.<sup>63</sup> Diamond's extreme views landed him in trouble when, in the aftermath of the assassination attempt on Field-Marshal French, the Irish Viceroy, he wrote an editorial entitled 'Killing No Murder' that justified the attempt on account of French being the head of a tyrannical system. It was printed in *The Catholic Herald* on 27 December 1919 and, as a result, Diamond was charged that 'he did unlawfully solicit, encourage, persuade, and propose to divers persons in Ireland to murder divers other persons carrying on his Majesty's Government in Ireland'.<sup>64</sup> Diamond served six months in prison, a sentence that has been described as severe in view of 'the age and manifest innocence of the culprit'.<sup>65</sup>

In April 1921 Kerr would have been fully aware of Diamond's trial of the previous year. As the owner of prominent Catholic newspapers, especially in Scotland, Diamond has been hailed as the leading voice of Scottish Catholicism, a voice that had been linked to incitement to murder. Dudley Edwards has commented that 'while it did not spell out the implication that the loyalties of all Scottish Catholics were thereby to be regarded as dubious, the meaning was there for any who had eyes to see'.<sup>66</sup> Kerr would have certainly wanted to distance himself from this view, as would his family. But in sending Diamond the Prime Minister's statement for publication, he was acknowledging the influence that he had through his readership, and the number of people that his papers reached. Kerr was trying to target Irish opinion in England and Scotland as well as the United States. His mistake was perhaps that he merely re-stated the policy that the government was being criticised for.

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<sup>63</sup> Owen Dudley Edwards 'The Catholic Press in Scotland Since the Restoration of the Hierarchy', p. 169.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>64</sup> 'Killing No Murder' article in *The Times*, Saturday 10 Jan 1920, p. 4, col. F.

<sup>65</sup> Owen Dudley Edwards 'The Catholic Press in Scotland Since the Restoration of the Hierarchy', p. 174.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

This is probably the only example of Kerr trying to target the mass opinion of ordinary people, and Catholic opinion at that. This may have been an attempt to counteract the propaganda campaign being run by Erskine Childers and Desmond Fitzgerald in London on behalf of Sinn Féin. Yet Diamond's reply implies that contemporaries were fully aware of Kerr's position, not only as Lloyd George's private secretary but as a member of a prominent Catholic family. Nationalists such as Diamond found Kerr's work on Irish matters disgraceful, not only because they disagreed with him but, more importantly, in view of his Catholic heritage.

When Kerr left Lloyd George's service in May 1921 it was partly to devote more time to Christian Science teachings. Writing to Lionel Curtis in 1922 he explained that:

So far as I am concerned Christian Science will have the first claim on my time and activities, but it will make me a more valuable rather than a less valuable coadjutor in any R.T. work that may be undertaken...I cannot expect you or the R.T. to share this point of view, though I don't think Christian Science has had a deleterious effect on me, so far! But you are familiar with choice between a religious and political method of dealing with the same human problems, and so will be able to appreciate, even if you don't share my point of view.<sup>67</sup>

It appears that, as time went on, Kerr did allow his religious beliefs to influence his political point of view as his world vision continued to develop. Billington has stated that through Christian Science Kerr began feel that he belonged to the Protestant

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<sup>67</sup> Philip Kerr to Lionel Curtis, 28 May 1922, Lothian Papers GD40/17/18/190.

stream of Christianity associated with the rise of modern democracy and individual freedom.<sup>68</sup> He acknowledges, however, that Kerr deeply opposed separatism in the political sphere and envisaged a future with roots in the two Western Christian traditions: 'the Protestant idea of resting authority with individuals, and the Catholic idea of giving institutional form to a universal human community'.<sup>69</sup> Although Kerr disagreed with the direct influence of church bodies in the realm of politics, he recognised the influence of religion in political thought. Kerr would go on to write regularly for the *Christian Science Monitor* and, by the time he died in 1940, most of his staff at the embassy in Washington were Christian Scientists.

Meanwhile Kerr's uncle, Lord Edmund Talbot, actually became the first Catholic Viceroy of Ireland in spring 1921.<sup>70</sup> It seems that the government decided to make a conciliatory gesture towards the Irish and passed a special Act of Parliament so that he could be appointed. In order to do so, Talbot was elevated to the peerage and took the title Viscount Fitzalan of Derwent. Unfortunately, there appears to be no correspondence between Kerr and his uncle, or indeed any reference to Fitzalan's appointment, in Kerr's papers. Considering the fact that the latter had been working on the Government of Ireland Bill and its aftermath between 1919 and 1921, it is astonishing that there is no reference to his uncle's appointment. It is possible that Kerr took up his position as editor of *The Daily Chronicle* in May 1921 as Lord Fitzalan was taking up his own post in Ireland. Nevertheless, Fitzalan appeared to have come as an emissary of peace, rather than as a symbolic gesture. Having been in Ireland a only month he publicly admitted that the Black and Tans had committed

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<sup>68</sup> David P. Billington, *Lothian, Philip Kerr and the Quest for World Order* (Westport, 2006) p. 78.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Edmund Bernard Fitzalan-Howard was the third son of the fourteenth Duke of Norfolk and Lady Anne Kerr's brother. He was a major beneficiary in the will of Bertram Arthur Talbot, and in accordance with the will assumed the surname Talbot. He was known as Lord Edmund Talbot until 1921 when he became Viscount Fitzalan of Derwent.

horrible crimes, and, unlike his predecessor, he took his family to Ireland with him. After the Anglo-Irish Treaty of December 1921 Fitzalan stayed on a year more, having reigned 'over the infant Free State as well as Northern Ireland'.<sup>71</sup>

Kerr's personal religious position, and his family's Catholicism, provides a fascinating dimension to his connection with Irish affairs. His imperialist background convinced him that religion and politics must be kept completely separate from one another; as a result the influence that the Church held over the Irish population continued to frustrate him, although in Ireland's case this showed some naivety. Meanwhile, he was involved in attempts by religious leaders to mediate in the Anglo-Irish conflict but he continued to staunchly defend the government's policy. Indeed, Kerr was in no sense a spokesperson for Catholicism; rather his religious background gave him a certain credibility that could be used to the government's advantage and made him especially useful as a key advisor during this period. It could be argued, however, that the Irish situation confirmed his decision to break with the Catholic faith. There was undoubtedly a strong religious theme to Kerr's life, as there was to the Irish question, and where the two intersect provides us with fresh insights into the attempts to find an answer to the Irish question during this period.

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<sup>71</sup> Frank Owen, *Tempestuous Journey*, p. 276.



## Chapter 8

### Philip Kerr at *The Daily Chronicle* in 1921

Philip Kerr left Downing Street in May 1921 to take directorial control of Lloyd George's newspaper, *The Daily Chronicle*. Although he was in this position for only six months it was during this time that the Anglo-Irish negotiations took place and the subsequent Treaty was signed. *The Daily Chronicle* was Lloyd George's mouthpiece, and for these crucial six months Kerr was at the helm. This chapter does not attempt to explore the role of the press in the Irish question, or indeed the history of the *Daily Chronicle*. Rather, it aims to consider Kerr's role and position on Ireland during his six months as the paper's director. The thesis as a whole has focused on Kerr's time as Lloyd George's secretary in light of his background and beliefs. An exploration of his time at the *Chronicle* provides a well rounded ending to the work that he did for the Prime Minister in relation to Ireland. Although ultimately Kerr would have taken instructions from Lloyd George regarding the paper's editorial policy and content, it will become clear that he still tried to offer the Prime Minister advice on Ireland, even though he had left Downing Street. The primary materials for Kerr's time at the *Chronicle* are largely unexplored. To date, there has been no work connecting Kerr to Irish affairs during this short time as it was his Round Table colleague and friend, Lionel Curtis, who acted as secretary to the British delegation at the Anglo-Irish negotiations. Therefore this section aims to add to our understanding of Kerr's work on Ireland in the final months that he served his chief.

There is a rich literature surrounding the Irish question in 1921 and, equally, there is a substantial amount of work relating to the British press at the time and its

coverage of Anglo-Irish relations. The classic work in this respect is D. George Boyce's *Englishmen and Irish Troubles* which deals with the way in which public opinion, as put forward through the British press, influenced the government's Irish policy between 1918 and 1922.<sup>1</sup> Although Boyce's contribution is the main work to have explored the press in relation to the Irish question, there is a body of literature documenting the history of the press during Lloyd George's premiership. Stephen Koss's *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain* is one such work that attempts to chart the history of the British press in Britain in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>2</sup> Equally, a great deal of information can be gained from biographies and memoirs of newspaper men of the day. These include works on, or by, journalists or newspaper proprietors such as Lord Beaverbrook, Lord Northcliffe, J.L. Garvin and C.P. Scott.<sup>3</sup> Aside from witnessing the growth of the political press as we know it today, the period produced some of the most famous newspaper men in history. Kerr himself was closely acquainted with Waldorf Astor, proprietor of *The Observer*, and Geoffrey Dawson, editor of *The Times*.<sup>4</sup>

Where the literature is plentiful in these areas the same cannot be said of the *Daily Chronicle*. Although it has been discussed in the literature relating to Lloyd George, there has been no substantial work carried out on the *Chronicle* alone. J.M. McEwen has, however, written a helpful article on Lloyd George's acquisition of the paper in

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<sup>1</sup> D.G. Boyce, *Englishmen and Irish Troubles, British Public Opinion and the Making of Irish Policy 1918-22* (London, 1972).

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain* (London, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> Lord Beaverbrook, *Men and Power 1917-1918* (New York, 1956); G.K. Chesterton, *Autobiography* (London, 1936); David Ayerst, *Garvin of the Observer* (London, 1985); Trevor Wilson (ed.), *The Political Diaries of C.P. Scott 1911-1928* (New York, 1970). There are multiple works on Northcliffe including Henry James Greenwall, *Northcliffe, Napoleon of Fleet Street* (London, 1957); J. Lee Thompson, *Northcliffe: Press Baron in Politics, 1865-1922* (London, 2000); *The History of the Times, The 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and Beyond 1912-1948* (London, 1952).

<sup>4</sup> For Dawson see John Evelyn Wrench, *Geoffrey Dawson and Our Times* (London, 1955). There is no single biography of Astor, for information see David Ayerst, *Garvin of the Observer* (London, 1985); Virginia Cowles, *The Astors the Story of a Transatlantic Family* (London, 1979); John Grigg, *Nancy Astor* (Feltham, 1982); Norman Rose, *The Cliveden Set, Portrait of an Exclusive Fraternity* (London, 2001); John Turner, *Lloyd George's Secretariat* (Cambridge 1980).

1918.<sup>5</sup> He notes that the purchase of a modern, popular newspaper by the then Prime Minister was unprecedented in Britain at the time.<sup>6</sup> Lloyd George had had a fascination with the press from an early age and understood the potential of its power. Furthermore he was prepared to use it in order to advance his own interests. For the greatest British politician of the day to purchase the newspaper at such a momentous time in British history would have had an immeasurable impact on the development of the press as we know it. This makes Kerr's move to the *Chronicle* in 1921 even more intriguing, along with the *Chronicle's* coverage of Anglo-Irish politics for the six months that he was there.

Kerr's biographers have also failed to examine his move to the *Daily Chronicle* and the time that he spent there in any great detail, most likely because he was there for so short a time. David P. Billington has noted the fact that Kerr's health was suffering once more in late 1920 as a result of overwork, the strain of the peace treaties and imperial management. He suggests that Lloyd George had decided to let go of Kerr in the autumn of that year, arranging for him to become the political director of the *Daily Chronicle*. Kerr took up the post in May 1921, resigning after only six months.<sup>7</sup> There are a number of reasons usually cited for Kerr leaving Downing Street. These include the hypotheses that he was overworked or that he wanted to devote more time to Christian Science. If either of these were true then it seems absurd that Kerr would have taken on a directorial role of a national newspaper, and with it all of the work and extra pressure such a role would bring. It is more convincing to argue that Kerr's move was a calculated one on Lloyd George's part. He did, after all, have a remarkable knack of using people while they suited his

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<sup>5</sup> J.M. McEwen, 'Lloyd George's Acquisition of the Daily Chronicle in 1918' *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Autumn, 1982), pp. 127-144.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>7</sup> David P. Billington, *Lothian, Philip Kerr and the Quest for World Order* (Westport, 2006) p.72.

purpose. This period has been described by Kenneth O. Morgan as 'Lloyd George's Last Stand' and it can be argued that Kerr best served his master elsewhere at this stage. Morgan has noted that his circle of advisors was being diluted at this time:

The Garden Suburb of private advisers was disappearing, its major figure, Philip Kerr, having departed in May 1921 to manage the pro-Government *Daily Chronicle*. His successor, Edward Grigg, a liberal-minded imperialist of humane sympathies, free from Kerr's brand of exotic mysticism, enjoyed less scope than had his predecessor. The rest of Lloyd George's private entourage...were functionaries on a lower level from the body of advisors such as Adams, Kerr, and Astor who had surrounded the leader in 1917-18.<sup>8</sup>

Stephen Koss has also argued that it suited Lloyd George to have Kerr at the *Chronicle* in 1921. He explains that, despite the success of the coalition at Westminster, it failed to take root in the constituencies where local newspapers helped to maintain the spirit of sectional partisanship.<sup>9</sup> The press therefore hindered the fusion of the government by exposing the difficulties of the parliamentary arrangement. The *Daily Chronicle* was the only devoted advocate of the government's make up. Apparently Lloyd George was advised by Frederick Guest in September 1920 that the *Chronicle* could be edited by George Herbert Perris, subject to supervision 'by some tactful person with good common sense'.<sup>10</sup> Koss writes that within weeks Kerr had left his desk at Downing Street to take over the political directorship of the *Chronicle*. In fact, as previously noted, although the arrangements

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<sup>8</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity, The Lloyd George Coalition Government 1918-22* (Oxford, 1979) p. 260.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain* (London, 1990) p. 817.

<sup>10</sup> Guest to Lloyd George, 16 Sept 1920, Lloyd George Papers F/22/2/13, quoted in Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain* (London, 1990) p. 817-818.

were made for his transfer in November 1920 Kerr stayed at Downing Street until May 1921. Following the death of Perris in 1920 his brother, Ernest Alfred Perris, took over as the *Chronicle*'s editor. He remained in the position until the *Chronicle* merged with the *Daily News* to become the *News Chronicle* in 1930.<sup>11</sup>

Although the *Daily Chronicle* presented a new challenge, Kerr did not see it as a long-term commitment. He believed that to do the job properly he would need to stay for at least ten years during which time he should go into parliament in order to make contacts. He told Lloyd George that he was not prepared to do this.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the directorship may have felt like a demotion following his time at the very centre of affairs at Downing Street. Yet Kerr did agree to take up the post at the *Chronicle* for a transitional period.<sup>13</sup> Koss argues that nothing could have suited Lloyd George better, although 'Lloyd George's requirements were more easily met than those of Kerr, whose authority went without formal recognition'.<sup>14</sup>

It could be argued that Kerr was perfectly suited to his role at the *Chronicle*. Aside from his prior editorial experience of *The State* in South Africa, and later of the *Round Table*, he had inside knowledge of the workings of government like few others. As the previous chapters have demonstrated, in over four years as private secretary to Lloyd George he had gained a close knowledge of the Prime Minister. He had drafted legislation, as well as countless speeches, and to some degree handled the government 'spin' on policy as it would be presented to the press. The *Daily Chronicle* took the chief role in presenting the Prime Minister in a positive light before the nation and few had better credentials greater than Kerr for such a post.

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<sup>11</sup> For George Herbert Perris see Robert Gomme, 'Perris, (George) Herbert (1866–1920)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2008. Very little is known of his brother Ernest who edited the *Chronicle* under Kerr's supervision.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain*, p. 818.

<sup>13</sup> For Dalziel see Marc Brodie, 'Dalziel, (James) Henry, Baron Dalziel of Kirkcaldy (1868–1935)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2008.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

Like other positions he held throughout his career, Kerr threw himself into the role, first embarking on a tour of major British cities in order to gauge public feeling in the different areas of the country.<sup>15</sup> This was probably an attempt to determine the expectations of the *Chronicle* readers. He clearly took the role very seriously and was not concerned about upsetting the other members of the Board. After having lunch with Kerr, Lionel Curtis and Edward Grigg, Thomas Jones recorded in his diary: 'Philip Kerr complaining that at a meeting of the Board of his newspaper the *Daily Chronicle* that morning the directors had been bewailing the falling circulation due to the highbrow tone given to the *Chronicle* by Philip Kerr'.<sup>16</sup> Jones also described the lunchtime discussion about the press in Britain at this time. The conclusion was reached that the *Manchester Guardian* was the one great newspaper in the country. Someone remarked that it was 'the one thing between the P.M. and depravity'.<sup>17</sup> Indeed the *Guardian*'s editor, C.P. Scott, broke off his friendship with Lloyd George over his handling of Ireland. Kerr, however did, what he could in a six month period to counter-act the criticism aimed at the Prime Minister.

It is extremely difficult to determine what changes in personnel Kerr may have made, if any, at the newspaper or which journalists were reporting on Ireland for the *Chronicle* in 1921. Unfortunately, there appear to be no surviving documents relating to the running of the *Chronicle*, but a number of the reporters can be identified. Between July and December the majority of leading articles about Ireland were written by Arthur Pole Nicholson, the *Daily Chronicle*'s political correspondent from 1920-23. Nicholson hailed from London and had worked on the parliamentary staff of the *Times* from 1895-1905, reporting on Gladstone's funeral in 1898. He had

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<sup>15</sup> J.R.M. Butler, *Lord Lothian (Philip Kerr) 1882-1940* (London, 1960) p. 82.

<sup>16</sup> Keith Middlemass (ed.), *Thomas Jones, Whitehall Diary, Volume I, 1916-1925* (London, 1965) p. 180.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

remained there as parliamentary correspondent from 1908 to 1914 when he resigned over a difference of policy, although it is unclear what this was. Nicholson then went on to work for a succession of Liberal newspapers, writing for the *Daily News* before joining the *Daily Chronicle* in 1920. He had a special interest in Indian political problems and wrote widely on the subject.<sup>18</sup> This may have endeared him to Kerr who was also interested in the politics of India. In 1928 Nicholson published *The Real Men in Public Life: Forces and Factors in the State* in which he wrote 'unbiased' sketches of contemporary public figures, including Lloyd George. He made no reference to the *Daily Chronicle* but, when discussing Lloyd George's replacement of Asquith, he rather bluntly stated:

Only one point has been missed, which, I may as well add to the narrative.

The liaison between the mind of Mr. Lloyd George and the *Times*, which resulted in the article that finally upset Mr. Asquith's equilibrium, was Mr.

Philip Kerr.<sup>19</sup>

Nicholson did not elaborate on this point. It seems a slightly odd observation, however, as Kerr only joined Lloyd George's secretariat when the latter was already Prime Minister. It is possible that Nicholson did not approve of Kerr during his time as the *Chronicle*'s director, although we cannot be sure.

The parliamentary correspondent for the *Daily Chronicle* during this time was Frederick James Higginbottom, who did have specialist knowledge of Ireland. In 1882 the London-based press agency, the Press Association, had sent him to Dublin

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<sup>18</sup> These included his volume *Scraps of Paper: India's Broken Treaties, Her Princes, And the Problem* (London, 1930).

<sup>19</sup> A.P. Nicholson (A.P.N.), *The Real Men in Public Life: Forces and Factors in the State* (Glasgow, 1928) p. 30.



as their special correspondent where he stayed for almost ten years. Dilwyn Porter has written that 'His reporting during an especially troubled phase of Anglo-Irish relations established the Press Association as the principal supplier of Irish news for London and the provincial press'.<sup>20</sup> Higginbottom also served briefly as a parliamentary correspondent for the *National Press*, a Dublin daily, on his return to London in 1891. He had a great deal of experience reporting on Ireland when he re-joined the *Daily Chronicle* in 1919 (having also worked there briefly in 1900). Higginbottom published his memoirs in 1934 but made no reference to Kerr or the *Chronicle*. In fact they only cover the period up until 1911, when Higginbottom left the editorship of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. He was an admirer of Lloyd George and claimed to have been in favour of his National Insurance Act and the controversial budget of 1910, even when he was compelled to criticise the measures as editor of the *Gazette*:

To me, the National Insurance Act was a stroke of statesmanship that stamped its author as a real political genius. It compelled in me an appreciation of Mr. Lloyd George that was the beginning of a personal admiration that grew with later years, and has endured to this day.<sup>21</sup>

This may explain why he re-joined the *Daily Chronicle* in 1919, following Lloyd George's purchase of the paper in 1918.

R.A. Scott-James was a leader writer for the *Chronicle* from 1919 to 1930 and contributed a number of articles on Ireland, although not as many as Nicholson. The only two reporters that we know of who were Irish, or of Irish descent, were Martin

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<sup>20</sup> Dilwyn Porter, 'Higginbottom, Frederick James (1859-1943)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Sept, 2004).

<sup>21</sup> Frederick J. Higginbottom, *The Vivid Life, A Journalist's Career* (London, 1934).



Henry Donohoe and John George Hamilton. Donohoe was born in Galway and appears to have been the longest serving of the reporters discussed here. He had been a special correspondent for the Boer War in 1899 and went on to report for the *Chronicle* on wars and revolutions across the world.<sup>22</sup> Donohoe was the *Chronicle*'s Paris correspondent between 1920 and 1927 and contributed very little on Ireland. Hamilton was born in Manchester and was of Irish descent. He moved to the *Chronicle* from the *Daily News* in 1921 and may have been appointed by Kerr. Of all of those reporting on the Irish situation as it unfolded, Nicholson seems to have contributed the majority of the leading articles. It appears that those journalists who were Irish, or had special expertise in Irish matters, contributed fewer articles on the Irish question. Nicholson's prominence can be explained by the fact that it was necessary for the paper to follow closely the developments between the government and the Sinn Féin leaders.

The timing of Kerr's appointment to the *Daily Chronicle* coincided with the most momentous and widely documented six months in the history of Anglo-Irish relations. The *Chronicle* was essentially Lloyd George's mouthpiece during this time. Historians have covered this period at length so the events will not be explored in detail here. Instead, the focus will be Kerr's reaction to them during his time at the newspaper. The Government of Ireland Bill became law on 3 May 1921. Kerr had steered it through its conception, drafting and implementation over the previous two years. As discussed in the previous three chapters, the violence in Ireland had worsened during the first few months of 1921. On account of reprisals by the crown forces, public opinion was growing against the government's Irish policy. Frank Owen has recorded how the country's most powerful newspapers, such as *The Times*,

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<sup>22</sup> Donohoe wrote *With the Persian Expedition* (London, 1919).

*The Manchester Guardian*, *The Westminster Gazette* and *The Daily News*, attacked the government's approach.<sup>23</sup> These were all Liberal papers with the exception of the *Times*, which was described as 'independent' or 'unclassified'.<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, the speech given by King George V at the opening of the Belfast Parliament on 22 June 1921 had been received well in both Britain and Ireland, due to the appeal for peace on all sides of the conflict. Lloyd George took advantage of the public mood and contacted de Valera, inviting him to a conference in London with a view to finding reconciliation between Britain and Ireland. The military truce began on 11 July and on 14 July de Valera met with Lloyd George at Downing Street.

Under Kerr's direction, the *Chronicle* supported the government's line throughout June, July and August, with emphasis on phrases such as 'Cabinet's Pledge for Irish Peace'.<sup>25</sup> On the day the truce began, the 11 July, the leading article read: 'Although the agreed truce is timed to begin at noon today, the Government began to act up to the spirit of it on Saturday'.<sup>26</sup> In Nicholson's article of the 22 July, Kerr's influence was evident in its description of the hypothetical offer of 'Dominion Government For North and South' and in pointing out that 'The Home Rule Act has given Ulster her safeguards already. No change can be made except under the express machinery of that Act'.<sup>27</sup> The piece also reported that the help of the bishops was needed and that de Valera could not hold all of the responsibility.

The discussions however were not straightforward with de Valera refusing to budge on the principle of Irish unity. The Prime Minister's offer amounted to full dominion status for southern Ireland, with full control over taxation and finance,

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<sup>23</sup> Frank Owen, *Tempestuous Journey* (London, 1954) p. 572.

<sup>24</sup> See Boyce, *Englishmen and Irish Troubles* p. 198.

<sup>25</sup> *The Daily Chronicle*, Friday 22 July 1921, p. 1, columns 1-2; *The Daily Chronicle*, Thursday 28 July 1921, p. 1, columns 1-2.

<sup>26</sup> *The Daily Chronicle*, Monday 11 July 1921, p. 1, columns 1-2.

<sup>27</sup> *The Daily Chronicle*, Friday 22 July 1921, p. 1, columns 1-2.

defence, and home affairs. The conditions of the deal included safeguards for Ulster, British military control of the Irish seas, no tariffs on British goods and Ireland was to share in the British national debt. De Valera rejected the offer declaring that the terms did not amount to dominion status at all. Following his return to Ireland, a war of words took place between the two leaders that lasted until September 1921.

Throughout August the *Chronicle* ran headlines such as 'Ireland's Golden Opportunity. Will Dáil Éireann Accept the Peace?' and 'De Valera's "No" to Peace Offer'.<sup>28</sup> An editorial 15 August was titled 'Ireland, Her Choice Between Substance and Shadow'. It observed that 'Such an offer, so far-reaching in its scope, so generous in its details, has never before in history been made to Catholic and Nationalist Ireland'.<sup>29</sup> All of these placed the responsibility for the peace process on de Valera's shoulders. The *Chronicle* also, not surprisingly, focused on American approval of the Cabinet's offer and the 'Disappointment There if Offer is Rejected'.<sup>30</sup> An article on 17 August described the 'advice' given to de Valera by the *New York Globe* that to reject the Cabinet's offer would be to 'alienate the last vestige of sympathy that may have been left for their cause by the conduct of their agitators in this country and bring sorrow to all disinterested friends of Ireland'.<sup>31</sup> The piece announced that this was the 'practically unanimous view of American newspapers of all shades of opinion'. This is, in fact, reminiscent of Kerr's assessment of American press opinion as presented in Chapter 6 of this thesis. The sample of 'typical expressions' supporting the Cabinet's offer included those from the *New York Times*, the *Liberal Evening Post*, the isolationist *New York World* and the anglophile *Tribune*.

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<sup>28</sup> *The Daily Chronicle*, Tuesday 16 August 1921, p. 1, columns 1-2; *The Daily Chronicle*, Thursday 18 August 1921, p. 1, columns 1-2.

<sup>29</sup> *The Daily Chronicle*, Monday 15 August 1921, p. 4, column 1.

<sup>30</sup> *The Daily Chronicle*, Tuesday 16 August 1921, p. 1, column 2.

<sup>31</sup> *The Daily Chronicle*, Wednesday 17 August 1921, p. 6, column 3.

There were no extracts from Irish-American papers. This was hardly a wide-ranging sample.

It appears that Kerr was taking the general Cabinet line. But he was also irritated by the ‘annoyingly mild’ nature of English press opinion with regards to de Valera’s procrastination. On 5 September Kerr wrote to the Prime Minister in reference to de Valera’s reply to the government printed in the press that day. His reply restated the rejection of the government’s proposals, on the basis that they did not guarantee Ireland freedom from British control. Acknowledging that force would not solve the problem, de Valera ended by declaring that his side was ready to appoint plenipotentiaries. Kerr dismissed the reply, observing that ‘It is of course the same old stuff: “No” in one line, and “Yes” in the next’.<sup>32</sup> He thought that the British press were taking a moderate line because:

they have twice had an apparent ‘never, never’ reply from de Valera, and don’t take it seriously. For instance the Daily Mail’s poster: ‘Why does de Valera go on banging at an open door?’ represents not unfairly the general impression.<sup>33</sup>

Kerr believed that ‘people are sick of palavering and want things brought to a head’. He counselled Lloyd George to send a short reply to de Valera saying:

We have had enough palavering. The issue is quite simple. Do you consent to negotiate on the basis of Ireland’s acceptance of membership of the British Commonwealth with all that it entails, or do you refuse? The time has gone

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<sup>32</sup> Philip Kerr to Lloyd George, 5 Sept 1921, Lloyd George Papers F/34/2/6.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

past for talking any more about conditions or for further delay. We must have a plain yes or no answer by September [date left blank]. If it is yes than negotiations can proceed, or if it is no or we get no reply, we shall take it as a denunciation of the truce.<sup>34</sup>

Kerr explained that in taking such action Sinn Féin would then 'have the clear responsibility before the world, and before Irish opinion, of choosing between acceptance of the principle of the Government offer and war'.<sup>35</sup> In view of the delicacy of the situation this was hard-line advice that would in effect, back the Sinn Féin leaders into a corner. Yet Lloyd George preferred to follow a more moderate line and did not follow Kerr's advice. Nevertheless, the evidence shows that Kerr was still trying to influence him from Fleet Street.

Later in the month Kerr wrote to Lloyd George again, this time with a greater sense of urgency. He warned of a world-wide movement against Britain, directly linked with Sinn Féin. He claimed to have received information from two different sources, 'one American and the other clerical', and described the information as 'disquieting'.<sup>36</sup> We do not know exactly how Kerr came by this information, or who the sources were, but the description of them as American and clerical ties in with the themes of the previous two chapters. No doubt he maintained his previous contacts from Downing Street. According to his information, Kerr identified a section of Sinn Féin that had no desire to reach a settlement with Britain. Instead, he described the activity of 'American Sinn Féin', a separate entity from Irish Sinn Féin, which, he argued, were 'animated by a hatred of Great Britain far more than love of Ireland'. Kerr wrote that a large number of people made vast amounts of money, millions of

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Philip Kerr to Lloyd George, 14 Sept 1921, Lloyd George Papers F/34/2/7.

dollars, based on this hatred, through Irish newspapers, films and propaganda. Far more worryingly, he linked the American agitation with other hostile groups abroad, such as 'Indians, Egyptians, Bolshies, and all the haters of England in France, Germany etc'. He explained that such groups saw a real chance of 'smashing the British Empire'.<sup>37</sup> Kerr's intelligence suggested that a section of Sinn Féin meant to prolong the negotiations in order to discredit Britain, and that she was facing an international movement, not merely her old troublesome neighbour. In his view, an ultimatum was necessary in order to persuade Ireland to accept membership of the British Empire or become prey to other foreign interests. He stressed the need for urgency and believed that time was an important factor in the negotiations.

It is difficult to determine just how serious Lloyd George considered Kerr's letter to be. The *Chronicle* however printed a piece based on this information two days later. The column was written by 'Politicus'. We cannot be absolutely certain who this was. Economist John Maynard Keynes occasionally wrote as 'Politicus' and J.L. Hammond wrote under the same pseudonym for the *Manchester Guardian*. Yet it is highly probable that the 'Politicus' in this instance was Kerr as the piece in question was almost identical in content to the letter written to Lloyd George on 14 September. It began by stating that 'The well informed writer of the article below, the authority of whose sources of information cannot be questioned, is a sincere sympathiser with Ireland and her aspirations'.<sup>38</sup> The piece argued that public opinion was confused about the conduct of the Sinn Féin leaders because of the government's 'generous offer...of Dominion status'. This was said to be all the more surprising because 'public opinion in America and throughout the world is almost unanimous for acceptance. And...the great mass of free Irish opinion is for settlement on these

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> *The Daily Chronicle*, Friday 16 September 1921, p. 4, column 3.

terms, too'.<sup>39</sup> The reluctance of the Sinn Féin leaders to accept the offer was partly explained by the fact that they were 'elected on the Republican ticket'. 'Politicus' also made allowances for the fact that 'Most of them are inexperienced in politics and have only just emerged from prison or internment camps, or from being on the run'. He argued that as a result it would be unreasonable to expect immediate acceptance or complete trust in the sincerity of the 'British attitude'.

Despite this, 'Politicus' pointed to the forces 'hindering this process of reconciliation' between Great Britain and Ireland, describing 'another movement in Sinn Fein of a different kind – a movement resting not on love on Ireland, but on hatred of Great Britain, and based not on Ireland, but on foreign countries'.<sup>40</sup> These were supposedly forces that wanted to seize power in Egypt, India and elsewhere'. He continued that 'Of all these the irreconcilable Irish in America are the leaders' and their motive was not Irish freedom but the destruction of England. The article pointed to the business aspect of this and the money made through 'newspapers, in cinemas, in countless ways'. The objective was said to be the failure of the negotiations and, ultimately, a war in Ireland that would secure a republic. The theory was that the establishment of an Irish republic would promote similar movements in 'Egypt, India and every other land under the British flag'.<sup>41</sup> 'Politicus' warned that 'these sinister forces whispering in the ears of sincere but inexperienced and weary men may have a fatal influence at the decisive moment'.<sup>42</sup> Whether or not Kerr was in fact 'Politicus' is not so important. The fact that the piece was printed, based on his information, is extremely relevant. It demonstrates that he was still receiving information regarding Ireland while at the *Daily Chronicle*, drawing it to the Prime Minister's attention, and

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> *The Daily Chronicle*, Friday 16 September 1921, p. 4, column 4.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.



acting on it through making it public. The well-being of the Empire still appears to have been Kerr's main concern, although this point was emphasised more in his letter to Lloyd George than in the article.

Although the *Daily Chronicle*, as Lloyd George's mouthpiece, supported the government offer of dominion status, this was not however Kerr's view. In a letter to the Prime Minister on 28 September 1921, he set out his thoughts on dominion status for Ireland. The letter was written just days before de Valera accepted Lloyd George's final invitation to a conference in London, to begin the 11 October. This is the clearest example of him trying to influence the Prime Minister over Ireland while working at the *Daily Chronicle*. In view of Kerr's Round Table membership it would be easy to assume that he would support a dominion solution to the problem. This was simply not the case. Kerr still saw Ireland as a disloyal member of the Empire who had not earned the right to become a dominion. He wrote to Lloyd George: 'The essence of the Dominion Solution is a spirit of loyal partnership with the British Empire...It does not yet exist in Ireland'.<sup>43</sup> Kerr further stressed 'I am all in favour of your doing your utmost to bring them to the Dominion solution if it is possible, but I am becoming increasingly doubtful if it is possible for you to succeed'. He predicted that although it could be attempted, Sinn Féin would not make the necessary concessions to Britain, or to Ulster, in order to make a permanent settlement possible.

Kerr's alternative was to find a mode of peaceful co-existence until such a time as a settlement could be agreed. Although he declared that he would be prepared to face war in preventing Ireland from becoming an independent republic, he recognised that such a conflict would not 'convert Ireland from her irreconcilability'. Instead, he acknowledged that war would only drive the 'irreconcilable spirit underground', to be

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<sup>43</sup> Philip Kerr to Lloyd George, 28 Sept 1921, Lothian Papers GD40/17/633/3.



dealt with later.<sup>44</sup> Kerr proposed an agreement by which Sinn Féin accepted certain terms by treaty 'to undertake to abandon its claim for international status; to undertake to import no arms and to invite no foreign representatives or warships to its harbours; and to abandon any attempt to coerce Ulster by force.' In return, Britain would withdraw her troops and administration from Southern Ireland and 'leave Ireland absolutely alone'.<sup>45</sup> Although she would protect Ireland from foreign aggression and would probably have to maintain a naval base on the south-west coast, Ireland would thus have none of the privileges of a dominion. In this sense she would have no representation at the Imperial Conference or in the League of Nations. Kerr summarised that, in effect, Ireland would 'be left entirely alone in a ringed fence which she could not get out of, and from which no one outside could rescue her.'<sup>46</sup>

Kerr, however, also recognised the weaknesses of his plan:

Of course this would be no settlement. You can pick holes in it in a thousand places. It will break to pieces very rapidly, but it safeguards the two vital things, which are that Ireland, even though she does not accept Dominion status, is not an international problem; and the safeguarding of Ulster.

The suggestion may not have seemed so far-fetched had the offer of dominion status not already been on the table. Yet Kerr's plan appears to have been absurd in view of the delicacy of the negotiations and the fact that Ireland had already been offered dominion status already. Furthermore, it was partly based on a curious sense of teaching the Irish a lesson:

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

It also gives Ireland an opportunity at the same time of learning from bitter experience and responsibility of her present attitude and the folly of her leaders' attitude, which she will never learn from us or from conquest. The question of the authority of the crown might be solved by making Ireland a separate kingdom once more, under George V.<sup>47</sup>

Clearly Lloyd George did not take this advice and De Valera accepted his invitation to a conference within two days of Kerr writing this letter. Ultimately, Ireland gained dominion status as a result of the ensuing negotiations and the *Daily Chronicle* led the national rejoicing. It remarked: 'When the history of our times comes to be written, the reconciliation of union with Home Rule will be noted as an almost miraculous portent'.<sup>48</sup> Boyce notes that the rest of the British newspapers followed suit, 'with the exception of the "die-hard" press which still muttered its blood-curdling threats'.<sup>49</sup> Unsurprisingly, Lloyd George's role in the making of the peace was given special attention in the *Chronicle*.

There is little doubt that Kerr was present at the negotiations in 1921. He had been a central figure at Downing Street for four years and his close friend and colleague, Lionel Curtis, was secretary to the British delegation. Indeed the diaries of Thomas Jones record his presence, although they give no detail of any meaningful input on Kerr's part. He simply refers to him having walked with the Prime Minister to the House of Lords one morning in November during the negotiations.<sup>50</sup> Yet Andrew Boyle has alluded to the fact that Kerr was regularly at Downing Street while the

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> *Daily Chronicle*, Wednesday 7 December 1921 quoted in D.G. Boyce, *Englishmen and Irish Troubles* p. 172.

<sup>49</sup> D.G. Boyce, *Englishmen and Irish Troubles* p. 172.

<sup>50</sup> Keith Middlemass (ed.), *Thomas Jones Whitehall Diary, Volume III Ireland 1918-1925* (London, 1971) p. 168.

negotiations were taking place. In discussing Erskine Childers, the secretary to the Irish delegation, he explains:

Left high and dry outside all conference discussions, the Secretary normally passed the time debating constitutional niceties with Tom Jones, Edward Grigg, Philip Kerr, Geoffrey Shakespeare or Lionel Curtis. He remained unaware of the extent to which these advisors, as well as the ministers they served, had already gauged how deep were the dissensions inside the Irish delegation. Nor did he surmise how resolutely Lloyd George would play on it.<sup>51</sup>

It is unfortunate that there is no further correspondence to determine Kerr's views on the progress of the negotiations, or accounts of his conversations with Childers, or members of the British delegation. His role at the *Chronicle*, however, remained important in ensuring the developments were presented in a positive light for Lloyd George. On the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, the *Daily Chronicle* printed a historic front page spread with the signatures of the Treaty taking the central focus and the headline 'Great Irish Peace Treaty Signed'.<sup>52</sup> During the following days further articles detailed the rejoicing over the settlement and the support that it received, rather than the split within Ireland. Kerr had seen the Irish question through to its conclusion, first as the Prime Minister's secretary and in the last months as director of his newspaper.

Although Kerr left Downing Street in May 1921 he was thus still very much involved in the Irish question while at the *Daily Chronicle*; this connection has not

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<sup>51</sup> Andrew Boyle, *The Riddle of Erskine Childers* (London, 1977) p. 290.

<sup>52</sup> *The Daily Chronicle*, Wednesday 7 December 1921, p. 1.

been addressed in the literature before now. He continued to serve his chief in a press role in the last six months of 1921 while the Irish Question reached its conclusion. Under his direction, the *Daily Chronicle* reported on the peace progress between Britain and Ireland and on the historic settlement that was agreed in December 1921. Kerr also continued informally to advise Lloyd George during this period, revealing concerns about Irish support abroad and the granting of dominion status to Ireland. He never fully abandoned the view that Ireland was disloyal and the security of the Empire remained his main concern. This provides a rounded ending to Kerr's involvement in Irish affairs on behalf of Lloyd George, and demonstrates that he remained on the fringes of the Irish question until the point that the government reached a settlement.

## Chapter 9

### Epilogue – Kerr and Ireland post-1921

In his later career Kerr would never again be directly involved with the Irish question as he had been during his years serving Lloyd George. During the 1920s he supported himself through journalism and would continue to write articles for the *Round Table*, the *Christian Science Monitor* and the *Observer*. He held various positions from 1922 to 1940, the most long-term being Secretary of the Rhodes Trust from 1925 to 1939, with relatively short-term posts as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in 1931 and under-secretary at the India Office 1931-32; both in the government of Ramsay MacDonald. The most important role of his subsequent career was as Ambassador to the United States in 1939 to 1940. Meanwhile, in 1930 Kerr inherited the Lothian title, bringing not only a change in name and fortune but also greater responsibility in terms of his estates. Historians have paid a great deal more attention to him in this later period. This is largely due to his views on world government, his having supported the appeasement of Hitler, and the fact that he was a British wartime ambassador in America. The aim of this chapter is to survey Kerr's career post 1921 with particular reference to Ireland. As this is beyond the main focal point of this thesis, the chapter is therefore much broader and contextual than its predecessors.

Kerr decided to part from Lloyd George completely at the end of 1921. It seems he was ready for a change and wanted to devote more time to spiritual matters. Frances Stevenson wrote that 'I believe that his chief reason for leaving L.G. after

five years was because he found that his work at Downing Street encroached too much upon the time that he needed for his religion'.<sup>1</sup> The parting was amicable and Kerr remained devoted to Lloyd George. Stevenson maintained that 'We were sad at heart when he went, but in later years he was always ready to help L.G. in any particular scheme or plan if required, and we were always in touch with him'.<sup>2</sup> There is thus no reason to suggest that Kerr deliberately decided to distance himself from Lloyd George's administration, which was beginning to deteriorate. After leaving the *Daily Chronicle* he spent a year in the United States, living on the farms of families that belonged to the Christian Science Church.<sup>3</sup> He was therefore quite detached from United Kingdom affairs in 1922-24. Yet there is evidence that he was following developments in Ireland while in America. Lionel Curtis remained at the Colonial Office as advisor on Irish affairs until 1924 and Kerr would have received information from him. Writing from Boston in 1922, he commented to his mother 'So Lionel and Pat are coming over here, are they? ...I wonder if the Irish situation will interfere. It seems to be coming to a fresh crisis'.<sup>4</sup> The reference was undoubtedly to the anti-treaty split and the approach of civil war in Ireland. Kerr informed his mother a week later that Curtis had wired him 'asking whether I could take a set of lectures for him over here in August at Williamstown, supposing he cannot get away from the Irish negotiations'.<sup>5</sup> By 17 June Kerr thought that the situation looked more promising:

The Irish situation seems to be gradually improving, though it will take a long time yet for it to get straight – But agreement between the government[s]

<sup>1</sup> Frances Lloyd George, *The Years that are Past* (London, 1967) p. 106.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> David P. Billington, *Lothian: Philip Kerr and the Quest for World Order* (Westport, 2006) p. 75.

<sup>4</sup> Philip Kerr to Lady Anne Kerr, 4 June 1922, Lothian Papers GD40/17/467/13.

<sup>5</sup> Philip Kerr to Lady Anne Kerr, 11 June 1922, Lothian Papers GD40/17/467/13.

about the constitution is a great step forward. Arthur Griffith seems much the best man on the Irish side.<sup>6</sup>

This is unsurprising as Griffith, along with Michael Collins, agreed to the terms of the Treaty as an important first step to complete Irish self-government. Kerr would have also likely agreed with Griffith's earlier preference for a dual-monarchy system, whereby Ireland and the United Kingdom had separate governments under a shared monarch. In June 1922 he wrote to Nancy Astor: 'The Irish Constitution looks well, though it will probably produce trouble in Ireland'.<sup>7</sup>

Kerr was appointed secretary to the Rhodes Trust in 1925. Although the position did not directly relate to Ireland, it is possible to make some observations regarding his connection with Ireland through his work for the Trust. Kerr had not been employed since leaving the *Daily Chronicle* in December 1921, having withdrawn from public life. It seems, however, that the secretary-ship of the Rhodes Trust was too great an opportunity to turn down as it would allow him the chance to travel in the dominions and the United States for some time each year. The Trust itself was established in 1902 according to the will of Cecil Rhodes. Its purpose was to fund scholars from the then British Empire and the United States to study at Oxford. Rhodes was an English businessman and politician in South Africa as well as a staunch imperialist who had also studied at Oxford. He intended that the Trust be used to educate the future leaders of the world.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Philip Kerr to Lady Anne Kerr, 17 June 1922, Lothian Papers GD40/17/467/15.

<sup>7</sup> Philip Kerr to Nancy Astor, 19 June 1922, Nancy Astor Papers MS1416/1/4/51.

<sup>8</sup> For the history of the Rhodes Trust see Lord Elton (ed.), *The First Fifty Years of the Rhodes Trust and the Rhodes Scholarships 1903-1953* (Oxford, 1955); Anthony Kenny (ed.), *The History of the Rhodes Trust 1902-1999* (Oxford, 2001); Philip Ziegler, *Legacy: Cecil Rhodes, The Rhodes Trust and the Rhodes Scholarships* (London, 2008).

As General Secretary, Kerr was to be responsible to the trustees for the general administration of the scholarships and other aspects of the foundation.<sup>9</sup> Butler notes that for the next fourteen years Kerr's official headquarters were at Seymour House, Waterloo Place, which he would refer to as 'the centre of the empire'.<sup>10</sup> It was a role that he clearly loved and it was not until he became the British Ambassador to Washington in 1939 that he resigned. Kerr was also a great admirer of Rhodes. Butler states that the former 'was a very different man from Cecil Rhodes, as he was from Lloyd George, but he admired the genius and shared the ideals of each. Especially was this so in the case of Rhodes'.<sup>11</sup> There has been some historical controversy surrounding Rhodes and how ruthless, and indeed racist, he was as an imperialist. It seems that Kerr recognised these accusations, but he defended him:

To grade him as a mere brutal imperialist is to ignore the fact that he largely financed the Irish Home Rule Movement and until after the Raid was generally denounced in England by the die-hards of the day as an anti-imperialist!<sup>12</sup>

It is also worth noting as a point of interest that during Kerr's time as secretary to the Trust the awards were not extended to Europe as 'the founder's concern was for the British Commonwealth and Anglo-Saxon world'.<sup>13</sup> Scholarships were only opened to citizens of Ireland from 1992. Kerr does not appear to have raised the question of Irish applications even though Ireland was a British dominion. It may have been too

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<sup>9</sup> J.R.M. Butler, *Lord Lothian* (London, 1960) p. 127.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. 127.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Butler, *Lord Lothian* (London, 1960) p. 127-8.

<sup>13</sup> Philip Ziegler, *Legacy, Cecil Rhodes, The Rhodes Trust and Rhodes Scholarships* (London, 2008) p. 300.



controversial a subject and Anglo-Irish relations too delicate for the trustees to consider at that time.

There is one final possible connection between Kerr's involvement in Irish affairs and his position within the Trust. When he was appointed as General Secretary, Rudyard Kipling, who was a Rhodes trustee, resigned in protest.<sup>14</sup> Various reasons for this have been put forward by historians. The one most relevant to this thesis is the explanation given by Alex May who argues that Kipling 'held Kerr personally culpable for the empire's retreat in India, and later Ireland and Egypt'.<sup>15</sup> If this is true, it indicates just how influential contemporaries considered Kerr to have been over the Irish question.

Kipling's own comments on his decision to resign were as follows:

The Secretaryship has become increasingly important, and it is my conviction that it will add to the efficiency of the present holder of the office – and so to the advantage to the trust – if the only Trustee who questioned his fitness for the post, should not continue to be a member of the body under which he must serve. I am, therefore, asking the Trustees to discharge me from the duties of the trust...<sup>16</sup>

He later wrote to his daughter:

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<sup>14</sup> Works on Kipling include Lord Birkenhead, *Rudyard Kipling* (London, 1980); David Gilmour, *The Long Recessional: The Imperial Life of Rudyard Kipling* (London, 2002); Andrew Lycett, *Rudyard Kipling* (London, 2000); Philip Mallett, *Rudyard Kipling: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke, 2003).

<sup>15</sup> Alex May, 'Kerr, Philip Henry, Eleventh Marquess of Lothian (1882–1940)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2008.

<sup>16</sup> Rudyard Kipling to Sir Otto Beit, 18 June 1925 in Thomas Pinney (ed), *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling Volume 5, 1920-30* (New York, 2004) p. 237.

I am having rather a stiff time with the R. Trustees who are trying to save P[hilip]. K[err].’s ‘face’ at my expense: but I hope in time, when they have all finished having a turn at me and finding it no good – I *hope* to get the announcement which I stipulated to have them make, put in the press. Of course it can’t be said *why* I am going but I am not going to pretend to the public, it was ill health or press of work.<sup>17</sup>

Reasons often cited for Kipling’s objection to Kerr include the argument that he did not fight in the war, he was a Liberal, and associated with the policies of Lloyd George and the Round Table (although Kipling happily worked with Edward Grigg of whom the same could be said).<sup>18</sup> Another possible reason given is his ‘mixture of Catholicism and Christian Science’.<sup>19</sup>

May’s suggestion that Kipling blamed Kerr for the ‘Empire’s retreat’ in Egypt, Ireland and India is however more credible. Kipling was not anti-Irish or anti-Catholic; rather he was very fond of the people. Having befriended an Irish boy at school, G.C. Beresford, he wrote affectionately of the Irish and of Catholicism, most notably in *Kim*.<sup>20</sup> He had been strongly opposed to Irish Home Rule, signing the Ulster Covenant in 1914. Kipling’s son, John, had joined the Irish Guards and was later killed in the battle of Loos. Kipling went on to write the history of the Irish Guards, published in 1923.<sup>21</sup> Kerr and Kipling were thus both imperialists but with different views on Ireland. The former viewed Ireland as a disloyal member of the Empire whereas the latter saw her as an integral member who had played an active

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<sup>17</sup> Rudyard Kipling to Elsie Bambridge, 4 July 1925 in Thomas Pinney (ed), *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling* p. 242.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. pp. 25-6.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (London, 1901).

<sup>21</sup> Rudyard Kipling, *The Irish Guards in the Great War* (London, 1923).

role in the imperial war effort. Ironically, it seems that Kerr believed in Rhodes's view that federalism would ensure that she would not secede, yet Kipling believed that Kerr was at odds with the principles that Rhodes stood for. We cannot be absolutely certain of Kipling's reasons for objecting to Kerr's appointment, and there does not appear to be any record of Kerr having commented on this. It does seem possible, however, that his role in the Irish question may have played a part.

On the death of his cousin, Robert Schomberg Kerr, the Tenth Marquess, in March 1930, Kerr inherited the Lothian title.<sup>22</sup> He was almost forty-eight at the time. This coincided with a new period in his professional life. During the 1930s Kerr would serve as a member of the national government. In August 1931 the Labour Cabinet split over the question of reducing unemployment compensation to close the budget deficit. On forming a national government, Ramsay MacDonald found himself presiding over a strongly Conservative coalition. He wanted to include a prominent Liberal peer in the Cabinet but not as the head of a major department. As a result, Kerr was offered the role of Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, a Cabinet level office that oversaw the estates of the King.<sup>23</sup> Kerr held the position for barely two months, stepping down following the election of October 1931 when the Liberal and Labour parties lost most of their seats. He did however accept an appointment as under-secretary to Sir Samuel Hoare at the India Office effective from November 1931. Although this was a demotion in ministerial rank, India was a country that had interested him throughout his career. He had initiated Round Table discussions of India in 1912, visiting the country that same year as part of his world tour aimed at increasing his understanding of international affairs. Kerr was also a delegate to the

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<sup>22</sup> For the sake of consistency he will continue to be referred to as 'Kerr' rather than 'Lothian'.

<sup>23</sup> David P. Billington, *Lothian: Philip Kerr and the Quest for World Order* p. 102.

Round Table Conference on India in 1930. The conference proposed the federation of the whole of India as a basis for a new constitution.<sup>24</sup>

Although Indian federation is not a primary concern of this study, it nevertheless raises the question of the wider relevance of Kerr's work on Ireland.<sup>25</sup> In a number of instances, he denied that there were parallels between the two. In his *Round Table* article, 'The Crisis in India', in September 1930 he wrote that:

The comparison often drawn between India and the United States, the Dominions, or Ireland is valueless simply because in every case when the demand for Dominion status arose, the number of inhabitants did not exceed 10,000,000 and in most cases they were more or less homogeneous in race and language, and had no external dangers to fear.<sup>26</sup>

Equally, he appears to have been frustrated by Indian use of the Irish example. In the House of Lords he noted that Indian extremists pointed to Ireland as the model that they wished to follow but regarded this as inappropriate:

I venture to think that in doing so [aspiring to the Irish example] they misread the true meaning of that history. The root of the trouble in Ireland in recent times has arisen from the fact that the Irish question was drawn into the Party politics of Great Britain. One great Party in the State was long reluctant to admit the force of Irish Nationalism or the necessity for giving it legitimate satisfaction. The other Party in the State was just as reluctant to admit the

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<sup>24</sup> J.R.M. Butler, *Lord Lothian* (London, 1960) p. 177.

<sup>25</sup> For details of Kerr's involvement with Indian affairs see Gerard Douds 'Lothian and the Indian Federation' in John Turner (ed), *The Larger Idea* (London, 1988); David P. Billington, *Lothian: Philip Kerr and the Quest for World Order* p. 103-112.

<sup>26</sup> [Philip Kerr] 'The Crisis in India' in *The Round Table*, vol. xx (Sept, 1930) p. 694.

force of what, in the parlance of Indian politics, is called Communalism in Northern Ireland, or the necessity for giving it also legitimate satisfaction. As the result today both the United Kingdom and Ireland are divided, though not, I hope, for ever.<sup>27</sup>

He continued that 'In India we have so far avoided these pitfalls' because the issue had been kept out of party politics and he maintained that the Indian problem had a sense of 'un-exampled difficulty'.<sup>28</sup>

Despite this, Ireland did provide an important frame of reference for the Indian case. In the same speech in the House of Lords he expressed his belief that:

There is a peculiar alchemy in this old Empire, perhaps because we have been so often willing to place responsibility on our own rebels, and in doing so win them after a time to loyal and enthusiastic acceptance of the British Commonwealth system. We have experience of that kind in this country, in Ireland, in Canada, in South Africa.<sup>29</sup>

Kerr remained as under-secretary at the India Office until September 1932 when he left the government in protest at the Ottawa agreements. Yet he remained closely involved in Indian affairs and contributed to the discussions surrounding the 1935 Government of India Act. Billington writes that Kerr favoured gradual change but looked forward to a fully self-governing India. He saw the 1935 India Act as a step towards dominion status. It is probable that Ireland was very much present in his

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<sup>27</sup> Lord Lothian, 8 December 1931 in *House of Lord Debates* vol. 83, cc 300-312. Accessed through Hansard.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

thoughts. In an article written for *The Observer* in 1938 he wrote that 'In essence the position of the Muslims in India is not unlike that of Ulster in Ireland. Difference in religion is the real basis of their organisation as a political minority'.<sup>30</sup> Ireland thus provided an important frame of reference for him in the years post-1921.

Kerr's world view was developing in the 1930s. In articles for the *Christian Science Monitor* and for *The Observer* he would occasionally refer to Ireland when discussing the Commonwealth or his vision of imperial federation. In the face of growing international instability, Kerr increasingly came to believe in a World Commonwealth of Nations. This meant that the world would be divided into great blocs and federation would overcome the problem of national sovereignty, which in his view led inevitably to war. His writings during this period reflect these beliefs and set out his arguments for an international system to govern where he believed the League of Nations had failed.<sup>31</sup> On numerous occasions he referred to the 'British Commonwealth of Nations' and its self-governing dominions, including Ireland.<sup>32</sup>

In an article entitled 'British Crown Democratic in its Present Day Usage' in 1936, he wrote about how the British monarchy provided the 'link-pin' of the British Empire while exercising no political power, yet at the same time loyalty to the crown was necessary for the system to work.<sup>33</sup> After referring to Canada, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, and the Irish Free State, Kerr argued that 'all these people recognise the common obligation which finds its outward and visible sign in loyalty

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<sup>30</sup> Lord Lothian 'The New India II' in *The Observer* 24 April 1938, p. 16.

<sup>31</sup> These included his articles in *The Observer* entitled 'New League or No League' 16, 23 and 30 Aug 1936.

<sup>32</sup> Lord Lothian, 'Rock in a Quaking World' in *The Christian Science Monitor* 28 July 1937; 'Kingship in Britain Likened to United States Constitution' in *The Christian Science Monitor* 17 May 1939.

<sup>33</sup> Lord Lothian 'British Crown Democratic in its Present-Day Usage' in *The Christian Science Monitor* 12 Dec 1936.

to the throne'.<sup>34</sup> However, in an article on the Commonwealth Conference in *The Observer* he wrote that:

Ireland is in a peculiar position. Her long struggle for national sovereignty is too recent not to colour deeply her attitude to Great Britain. On the other hand, as the mother country of a large section of the Commonwealth peoples, and because her defence is inseparable from that of Great Britain, she is rapidly moving to loyal acceptance of membership in the Commonwealth, though she asks as a condition that Ulster should agree to put an end to partition.<sup>35</sup>

This view seems absurd considering the fact that Kerr had first hand experience of the strength of Irish resistance to partition and would not necessarily enter into a willing membership of the British Commonwealth after a long struggle for independence. Yet he was not so out of touch as may first appear when his comments are placed within the context of the negotiations between de Valera and Malcolm MacDonald in 1937, when the dispute over the Irish 'treaty ports' was resolved, much to the alarm of Ulster Unionists.<sup>36</sup> Kerr's vision in the 1930s was moving beyond federation to a World Commonwealth, and Ireland was included in this vision.

One of the most valuable pieces of evidence we have for determining Kerr's opinion on the Irish situation during this period is a letter he wrote in 1935, albeit in reference to the 1921 Anglo-Irish negotiations more than a decade earlier. In 1935 Frank Pakenham published his work on the Anglo-Irish Treaty, entitled *Peace By*

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Lord Lothian, 'The Commonwealth in Conference' in *The Observer* 13 Nov 1938, p. 16.

<sup>36</sup> See Deirdre McMahon, *Republicans and Imperialists: Anglo-Irish Relations in the 1930s* (London, 1984).

*Ordeal, an Account, from First Hand Sources of the Negotiation and Signature of the Anglo-Irish Treaty 1921*.<sup>37</sup> Pakenham was an interesting character in his own right and would remain a very public, and somewhat controversial figure, until his death in 2001. It is all the more interesting therefore that he sought Kerr's opinion of his work. Although from an Anglo-Irish ascendancy family on his father's side, Pakenham (later Lord Longford) would often refer to himself as Irish rather than English. He was a supporter of Irish nationalist politics, maintained a long friendship with Eamon de Valera, and in 1940 converted to Roman Catholicism, the church that Kerr had left in 1923. He was later credited with writing a biography of de Valera published in 1970 along with T.P. O'Neill.<sup>38</sup> Prior to the publication of *Peace By Ordeal* Pakenham sent a copy to Kerr, presumably because of his earlier involvement in Irish affairs. Kerr's reply to Pakenham in February 1935 is an invaluable source for this study.

Overall, Kerr's reaction to the work was a positive one, noting that (in proof) it was already 'a really great book' and that it would help towards healing and understanding between England and Ireland.<sup>39</sup> Yet he wrote lengthy criticism, reasoning that 'it would be an even greater book, if certain interpretations were modified'.<sup>40</sup> He began by correcting Pakenham's statement that England conquered Ireland in 1172, asserting that England and Ireland were conquered by the Normans at the same time. He argued:

The modern Anglo-Irish problem only arose with nationalism, democracy and the Reformation. Before that it was mixed up with feudalism and the divine

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<sup>37</sup> Frank Pakenham, *Peace by Ordeal, An Account, from first-hand sources, of the Negotiation and Signature of the Anglo-Irish Treaty 1921* (London, 1935).

<sup>38</sup> Frank Pakenham, The Earl of Longford and T.P. O'Neill, *Eamon de Valera* (London, 1970).

<sup>39</sup> Lothian to Pakenham, 19 Feb 1935, Lothian Papers GD40/17/294/562.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.



right of Kings. The same change is going on in India today: e.g. reproducing Indian nationalism and an Indian Ulster.<sup>41</sup>

As discussed above, Kerr was closely involved with the Indian question and therefore it is not surprising that he drew a comparison with the Irish situation. This lends further weight to the idea that he likened world problems to a single principle. He became increasingly concerned by what he perceived as the problem of 'national sovereignty' in these later years and his early experience with Ireland was something that he could draw on.

He informed Pakenham that he disagreed with some of his interpretations of the 1921 negotiations. He argued that the element of tragedy that the author presented did not arise from anything that happened during the course of the negotiations but in the fundamentals of the issue. He explained that while 'a settlement must leave Ireland independent in fact but within the Commonwealth on the symbolic side', there was disagreement in Ireland as to whether she would accept only a republic or settle for dominion status.<sup>42</sup> Kerr argued that the Ulster issue was 'always secondary because some form of partition was inevitable under any system'.<sup>43</sup> This is unsurprising as Kerr drafted the Bill that partitioned the country prior to the Treaty.

Furthermore, although Kerr had left Lloyd George's service in 1921 he never lost the sense that he was the latter's 'man' and defended the part that the Prime Minister played in the negotiations. He suggested to Pakenham that:

Lloyd George, I think, despite his skill in manoeuvre and showmanship, played a simpler part than that of the super astute negotiator and tempter you

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Lothian to Pakenham, 19 Feb 1935, Lothian Papers GD40/17/294/563.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

paint – almost the Machiavelli – who knew where he was going and how he was going to get there from the start.<sup>44</sup>

This goes against the widely accepted view of historians, such as Peter Hart in his account of the negotiations, that Lloyd George had an ‘extraordinary genius for manipulation and manoeuvre’ and displayed this from the outset to the grand finale he orchestrated.<sup>45</sup>

Equally, Kerr played down the notion of the ‘ultimatum’ put forward by Lloyd George, suggesting that Pakenham misread the significance of this incident. He argued that even if it was an ultimatum under threat of war (he refused to discuss whether or not it was) it was not the decisive factor. Instead, he credited Griffith and Collins with recognising that the moment had come when a decision had to be made one way or another. He insisted that they recognised that the Treaty gave Ireland the essence of freedom and therefore they did not consult their colleagues in Dublin and risk inevitable rejection. Kerr reinforced this idea claiming that ‘They must have known that no British Government could have re-started the war “in three days” if they had asked for time to take the decision of the Dail’.<sup>46</sup> For this reason, Kerr referred to both Griffith and Collins as heroes. But he seems to have recognised that they did not have the same attitude, as he referred to Griffith’s pledge that he would sign alone, if necessary, had Collins not agreed.

Despite the fact that Kerr had initially been opposed to dominion status for Ireland in 1921, he wrote at length regarding the idea that ‘the symbolism of the Republic is definitely a lower thing than the symbolism of independence within a commonwealth

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<sup>44</sup> Lothian to Pakenham, 19 Feb 1935, Lothian Papers GD40/17/294/565.

<sup>45</sup> Peter Hart, *Mick, The Real Michael Collins* (London, 2005) p. 294.

<sup>46</sup> Lothian to Pakenham, 19 Feb 1935, Lothian Papers GD40/17/294/567.

of equal nations – Dominion status’.<sup>47</sup> In his view, complete national independence was ‘the root evil of our time – the primary cause of war, armaments, poverty and unemployment’ and therefore a commonwealth with a duty to all was a much greater thing. He argued that ‘in standing for the Commonwealth Great Britain is not standing for anything imperialist or ignoble’. He told Pakenham that he believed Collins, and possibly Griffith, saw something of this whereas ‘De Valera does not – nor, I think, do you’.<sup>48</sup> He did not acknowledge that in signing the Treaty Collins saw it as a stepping stone to achieving a republic.

Kerr’s rationale here is fascinating and draws on the points raised in Chapter 7 regarding his views on religion and politics. He explained to Pakenham that ‘the final issue lay between what I may call the statesmen and the saints in politics’.<sup>49</sup> He suggested that:

The British attitude was that of the statesmen. So fundamentally was that of Griffith and Collins. But de Valera’s from the start was that of religion in politics who, if need be, will endure the last horrors of martyrdom for the faith that is in him.<sup>50</sup>

Kerr discussed this at length, contending that ‘I attribute in full measure all the religious virtues to de Valera’ which he put down to ‘the inevitable differences between a training in obedience to dogma and a training in freedom of thought about religion’.<sup>51</sup> Despite, or perhaps due to his own Catholic upbringing Kerr was prejudiced by de Valera’s religious stance and also that of Pakenham. He argued that

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<sup>47</sup> Lothian to Pakenham, 19 Feb 1935, Lothian Papers GD40/17/294/569.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Lothian to Pakenham, 19 Feb 1935, Lothian Papers GD40/17/294/564.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Lothian to Pakenham, 19 Feb 1935, Lothian Papers GD40/17/294/572.

the religious virtues displayed by de Valera were those 'which have made the great Churches – not religious – and the great wars over the creeds'. He told Pakenham: 'You accept these as the highest virtues and put those of the statesmen lower. Personally I reverse the process'.<sup>52</sup>

Kerr clearly saw the influence of Catholicism within Irish politics as a problem. Yet his letter to Pakenham reveals that by 1935 his thoughts on this issue had developed further. He argued that:

this difference [between the religious men and the statesmen] largely coincides with the difference between Protestantism and Catholicism. I have been in both churches and therefore speak with some experience. It involves such tremendous questions as why Jesus thought that the harlots and publicans (the politicians) were nearer the Kingdom of Heaven than the Pharisees (priests)...and whether he would have picked Griffith or de Valera as the nobler disciple. I will not try to answer these questions.<sup>53</sup>

There is a sense of irony here in that both Kerr and de Valera had, in former years, considered the priesthood.

During the 1930s Kerr gained notoriety for his membership of the 'Cliveden Set' and the appeasement of Germany. The Cliveden Set as a group (centred around the Astors, Kerr and Lionel Curtis) were linked with this policy.<sup>54</sup> Although Round Table member, Robert Brand, denied the existence of an actual 'set', Robert Boothby recorded in his memoirs that there was a "Cliveden Set", which did exercise a

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<sup>52</sup> Lothian to Pakenham, 19 Feb 1935, Lothian Papers GD40/17/294/571.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> For a detailed study of the Cliveden Set see Norman Rose, *The Cliveden Set, Portrait of an Exclusive Fraternity* (London, 2001).

considerable influence over the course of political events'.<sup>55</sup> As Chapter 4 highlighted, the group was influential in the sense that the Astors hosted grand weekend social events at Cliveden, to which influential politicians, journalists and high ranking civil servants of the day would be invited. Political issues would be widely debated and discussed at these gatherings. Boothby wrote that the group's influence was initially beneficial. He argued, however, that 'At a later stage, under the commanding and almost irresistible influence of Lord Lothian, the "Cliveden Set" became the intellectual background for what I shall never cease to believe was the fatal policy of appeasement'.<sup>56</sup>

Kerr did feel some sympathy with German aspirations. Having personally drafted the 'war guilt clause' in the Treaty of Versailles he felt that Germany had been treated harshly under its terms. He personally interviewed Hitler on two separate occasions and was convinced that Germany did not want war with Europe. It was a left-wing journalist, Claud Cockburn, who coined the term the 'Cliveden Set' and accused Lady Astor, Geoffrey Dawson and Kerr of trying to negotiate with Germany behind the back of the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden. This was without substance as Eden was the guest of honour at Cliveden on the weekend when the supposed gathering to plot the venture took place. The group was later accused of plotting to remove Eden in January 1938 when the Astors were actually in America and Kerr was in India. Despite the inaccuracy of these claims Billington argues that 'the charges of a Cliveden Set struck a popular chord and pointed to a convergence of political, intellectual, and social influence that did help keep the policy of appeasement going'.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Robert Boothby, *I Fight to Live* (London, 1942) p. 52.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> David P. Billington, *Lothian: Philip Kerr and the Quest for World Order* p. 129.

Billington's research points to Kerr's knowledge of Ireland influencing his attitude towards the Sudeten Crisis. Sir Nevile Henderson, the British Ambassador to Berlin, wrote to Kerr in 1938 comparing Czechoslovakia's attempts to control the Sudetenland to British efforts to control Catholic Ireland. He explained his view, noting that '7 million Czechs cannot go on compelling 3 ½ million Germans to work with them – we couldn't do it in Ireland where there was no big neighbour and the Czechs cannot hope to do it where there is one'.<sup>58</sup> Yet Billington argues that Kerr saw a better analogy between the Sudeten Germans and Irish Protestants. He describes an anonymous memorandum that Kerr sent to J.L. Garvin arguing that if Britain had lost the First World War, and Germany had forced Protestant Ulster into a unified Ireland, then Britain would have later pressed a claim to the Protestant north as soon as she had gathered her strength. Kerr reportedly described the analogy as one of the best things he had read on the Czech situation.<sup>59</sup> In view of the analysis presented in this thesis his reaction is hardly surprising. He had been closely involved with the problem of Ulster and drafted the bill that sought a short-term solution through partition of the predominantly Protestant six counties. His experience therefore led him to sympathise with the issue of German speakers in the Sudeten area of Czechoslovakia. Despite this, Kerr's support for appeasement should not be over-exaggerated. He believed that Hitler's aspirations were not unreasonable but was deeply concerned by his methods of attaining them. As the darker side of Nazism became increasingly apparent, he withdrew his support from the appeasement policy altogether and, albeit belatedly, turned his support to Churchill's proposal of a 'Grand Alliance' of nations against aggression.

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<sup>58</sup> Sir Nevile Henderson to Lord Lothian, 22 April 1930, Lothian Papers GD40/17/362/397.

<sup>59</sup> David P. Billington, *Lothian: Philip Kerr and the Quest for World Order* p. 134.

In 1939 Kerr replaced Sir Ronald Lindsay as the British Ambassador to the United States. He had been in his new role only a few short days before Britain was at war. Hence the literature surrounding Kerr is more plentiful for this last year of his life. The war, and its implications for the transatlantic relationship, obviously dominated Kerr's short time as Ambassador and his premature death in December 1940 meant that he did not live to see some of his efforts come to fruition. Yet even during this period there is some evidence to suggest that Kerr did address the Anglo-Irish relationship. This must be observed in view of de Valera's policy of Irish neutrality. He used this neutrality to further establish Ireland's place on the world stage as a nation in her own right.

Kerr's primary concern throughout 1940 was naturally to try and secure American support for the British war effort. As previous chapters have demonstrated he was in a position to recognise the importance of Irish-American opinion. John Colville, Churchill's secretary, wrote in his diary 5 February 1940 that:

There is trouble about two I.R.A. terrorists who are to be executed. Their death will make them martyrs in Ireland (where martyrdom is very coveted and very effective in its results) and will sway Irish opinion in the U.S.A. against this country. The Cabinet have discussed the matter, but seem disposed not to give way, despite the warning of Lord Lothian and a personal letter from De Valera to the P.M.<sup>60</sup>

This reference was to the hanging of two men in connection with a bombing in Coventry in August 1939. Neither had planted the device but were involved in the

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<sup>60</sup> Diary entry Monday 5 February in John Colville, *The Fringes of Power: Downing Street Diaries 1939-1955* (London, 1985) p. 81.

preparation and assembling of the bomb.<sup>61</sup> That Kerr warned the government against the executions is convincing. He had always maintained that the drawn out way in which the government carried out the executions following the Easter Rising of 1916, with daily reports in the press, had turned both Irish and American opinion in favour of the rebels. Kerr believed that this had effectively enabled Sinn Féin to gain power. He would not have wanted to see history repeat itself in 1940 when he was working so hard to gain American assistance.

In his speech at the 'Pilgrims' Farewell Dinner to Lord Lothian', following his ambassadorial appointment, Kerr further demonstrated his awareness of the link between the Irish question and Anglo-American relations:

Even the Irish question is not easy to put into perspective, for, while the powerful and talented Irish community in the United States has been politically opposed to Great Britain, it also derives from these islands, and Ireland itself is a mother country of the whole English-speaking world. I conceive it, therefore, to be my task, not merely to represent the policy of the British Government to the administration in Washington and vice versa, but to increase the mutual comprehension between the two peoples, which is much better than it used to be, but which is still by no means achieved.<sup>62</sup>

Interestingly, his early speeches as Ambassador seem to suggest that Ireland supported the British war effort. In October 1939 Kerr declared that:

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<sup>61</sup> See Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA* (Oxford, 2003) p. 61-62.

<sup>62</sup> Lord Lothian's speech at 'the Pilgrims' Farewell Dinner to Lord Lothian', Victoria Hotel, London, 13 July 1939, published in *The American Speeches of Lord Lothian, July 1939 to December 1940* (London, 1941) p. xli.



The attitude of the independent nations of the Commonwealth – Canada, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, and Ireland – has been made clear by their own Prime Ministers and Parliaments, free from all interference with Great Britain. The record is their decision and what they propose to do about sending troops or airplanes to the continent.<sup>63</sup>

This however may have been tactical in speaking before the American public. By giving the impression that Ireland was loyal to Britain it may have gained sympathy with the British if the neutrality issue became increasingly strained.

During 1940 Kerr did try to use his contacts to assist in addressing the problem of Irish neutrality. In March 1940 he wrote to Nancy Astor telling her:

Gray, the new U.S. Minister to Ireland is sailing for London in few days. He is a cousin of Mrs. Roosevelt's. He is a very nice fellow. Get in touch with him. He may be quite useful in Ireland – very pro. ally.<sup>64</sup>

Kerr was not necessarily going out of his way to help the situation by writing to Astor, but he was clearly keen to encourage Gray as he wrote to her again within a few weeks asking if she could arrange a meeting between him and Churchill, as Gray was 'anxious to discuss naval matters'.<sup>65</sup> Kerr had indeed been correct in saying that he was 'very pro-ally': Gray was highly critical of Irish policy towards the war and of de Valera in particular. De Valera, in turn, tried on numerous occasions to have Gray replaced as Ambassador. In his introduction to William A. Carson's *Ulster and the*

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<sup>63</sup> Lord Lothian's speech to 'the Pilgrims of the United States' 25 October 1939, published in *The American Speeches of Lord Lothian, July 1939 to December 1940* (London, 1941) p. 17.

<sup>64</sup> Philip Kerr to Nancy Astor 27 Feb 1940, Nancy Astor Papers MS1416/1/4/59.

<sup>65</sup> Philip Kerr to Nancy Astor 20 March 1940, Lothian Papers GD40/17/398/221.

*Irish Republic* in 1956, Gray wrote a scathing account of Ireland during the war, declaring that 'While Eire was thus exercising her neutral "rights" at the expense of her neighbours, she was almost daily asking and receiving favours from them'.<sup>66</sup> This was in reference to Gray's allegation that de Valera permitted Axis espionage from Ireland and kept Dublin lighted, hence guiding German bombers on their flight north to attack Belfast. He went on to write that all the while Britain and the Allies risked sailors' lives to transport essential supplies to Eire. Kerr could not have foreseen this uneasy relationship between Gray and de Valera. He hoped, however, that Gray's pro-ally stance would strengthen the British appeal for the use of Irish naval bases.

Kerr seems to have relied on the Astors as political contacts. In June 1940 Waldorf Astor encouraged him to bring further pressure on the Americans over Ireland:

Can you bring any influence to bear on Ulster to come to terms with Dev...  
Dev is doing his best but a united Ireland would strengthen his hand and  
enable him to deal with the IRA... a few American soldiers or airmen in S.  
Ireland and in France would have a most steadying effect.<sup>67</sup>

It remains unclear what the outcome of this request was. Kerr does not seem to have sought out Irish-Americans for assistance in the way that Cecil Spring-Rice did in the First World War. This is perhaps more surprising as he had a direct link to Joseph P. Kennedy, the American Ambassador to Britain who was a close acquaintance of Nancy Astor. As a friend of Neville Chamberlain, Kennedy had supported appeasement of Hitler and thereafter was notoriously linked to the so-called 'Cliveden

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<sup>66</sup> William A. Carson, *Ulster and the Irish Republic, With an Introduction by David Gray, United States Minister to Eire, 1940-47* (Belfast, 1957) p. ii.

<sup>67</sup> Waldorf Astor to Lothian 1 June 1940, Lothian Papers GD40/17/398/228.

Set'. As ambassadors for their respective nations, one would have expected them to be in regular contact under normal circumstances, yet, due to Kennedy's uneasy relationship with the American President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the two had little communication. Kerr had praised Kennedy in one of his early speeches, saying that he had done a great deal to increase understanding between the American and British people.<sup>68</sup> In reality, however, he appears to have been dismissive of Kennedy's political credibility due to his Irish heritage. Sir Henry Channon recorded in his diary of 4 November 1940:

Lothian presided over a small meeting of journalists held in the Ambassadors room at the FO and spoke with astonishing frankness for an hour. He is confident of Roosevelt's victory, and was rather scathing about Joe Kennedy, whom he dismisses as an Irish American, much concerned with the preservation of his property, his own in particular, since he has 'nine hostages to the future.'<sup>69</sup>

Channon was a notorious society gossip and some caution should be exercised, yet it is quite likely that Kerr would have taken this attitude. Chapter 6 demonstrated that, as Lloyd George's secretary, he had been dismissive of the political motives of Irish-Americans.

Following Kerr's death in December 1940, it was suggested to Roosevelt that Kennedy might be the perfect man to help Britain ease her troubles with neutral

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<sup>68</sup> Lord Lothian's speech at 'the Pilgrims' Farewell Dinner to Lord Lothian', Victoria Hotel, London, 13 July 1939, published in *The American Speeches of Lord Lothian, July 1939 to December 1940* (London, 1941) p. xli.

<sup>69</sup> Diary entry 4 November 1940 in Robert Rhodes James (ed.), *Chips: The Diaries of Sir Henry Channon* (London, 1996) p. 272.

Ireland.<sup>70</sup> It was thought that, as an Irish-American, he may have been able to persuade Eamon de Valera to open Irish ports to British warships.<sup>71</sup> It is therefore surprising that Kerr did not cultivate a stronger relationship with Kennedy when he was alive. In the meantime, he was trying to assist Churchill in enlisting Roosevelt's help to obtain Irish naval bases, as well as buying munitions and aircraft. In November Colville recorded in his diary that Kerr prepared a message for Roosevelt:

Lord Lothian has drafted a telegram for the P.M. to send to Roosevelt. It stresses very frankly our need for American support in obtaining the Irish naval bases...the P.M. thinks it so admirably written that he could not improve a word of it.<sup>72</sup>

This chapter has aimed to provide an epilogue to this study by surveying Kerr's career beyond 1921, with particular reference to Ireland. In doing so, it becomes clear that his earlier work on Ireland had a wider relevance and impacted on his later years. In presenting a broader survey of Kerr's connection to the Irish question post-1921 it becomes apparent that his earlier Irish work influenced him and he could draw on his experience in dealing with Indian federation and in developing his views on a world commonwealth. In the 1930s Kerr was able to view the 1921 settlement with greater perspective, although it remained an imperialist viewpoint. As the Ambassador to the United States in 1939-40 he attempted to assist the British government in enlisting American help over Irish wartime neutrality. Although Kerr's earlier experiences meant that in one sense he recognised the importance of American opinion regarding

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<sup>70</sup> Michael R. Beschloss, *Kennedy and Roosevelt, The Uneasy Alliance* (New York, 1980) p. 235.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Diary entry 12 November 1940 in John Colville, *The Fringes of Power: Downing Street Diaries 1939-1955* (London, 1985) p. 291-2.

Ireland, he never however went to great lengths to cultivate Irish-Americans for the British cause. This was perhaps his greatest error.

## Conclusion

Philip Kerr played a significant role in Anglo-Irish politics between 1917 and 1921. He acted as an advisor, draftsman, and the Prime Minister's representative in defending Irish policy. To date, Kerr's membership of the Round Table has tended to define his connection with the Irish question. This thesis has built upon and modified this view. This work challenges conventional wisdom that Lloyd George's chief Welsh aide, Thomas Jones, was the most important influence in Irish affairs.

Although Jones was influential during the 1921 Treaty negotiations, Kerr was the key figure who helped develop a settlement and advised Lloyd George in Irish matters. This effectively fills a gap in the existing literature as historians exploring the Irish settlement of 1920, and the role of the coalition government, have failed to acknowledge the importance of Kerr's presence. He had a valuable background that made him an asset to Lloyd George in addressing the Irish question.

Through exploring Kerr's connection to the Irish question we also gain greater knowledge of his own role in British and Irish history. This thesis has demonstrated the extent to which Ireland influenced his career. Kerr's childhood experiences influenced his impression of the country and its people in the sense that he would never view Ireland as a separate nation, but always as part of the British Empire. Kerr's residence in Ireland was also his first experience of a predominantly Catholic country, and he would have met powerful Catholic figures who were politically influential. Kerr's parents were a visible presence in the Catholic community during their years based at the Curragh and Lord Ralph Kerr held a high-ranking position in charge of the Imperial forces in Ireland.

As the main draftsman of the 1920 Government of Ireland Bill, Kerr helped to shape the settlement that was enacted. His correspondence with moderate Irish nationalists, his support for partition, repression of the extremists, and disapproval of a dominion solution all portray the complexity of his position as one of the Prime Minister's closest aides. There was no other member of Lloyd George's staff that filled the role that he did. Above all, Kerr enjoyed Lloyd George's confidence in Irish matters. The two men tended to be in unison in their views and the Prime Minister relied increasingly on Kerr, sending him to liaise with key figures, such as Colonel House and Archbishop Clune. Lloyd George's decision to use Kerr was possibly to appease them with his pro-American beliefs and Catholic background. While these interviews did not directly achieve anything, Kerr was able to lay down the government's principles. These included a refusal to back down over the question of an Irish republic and the necessity of partitioning the six Ulster counties.

The thematic chapters concerning Kerr's involvement with Ireland provide greater insight into the multi-layered aspects of the problem. Kerr's dealings with the American aspects suggest that the British were poorly informed regarding U.S. opinion during this period. He was the key conduit for intelligence on public opinion there. In acting as mediator between the American journalist, Carl Ackerman, Lloyd George and Chief Secretary for Ireland, Hamar Greenwood in 1920-21, he was able to put his own slant on Ackerman's interviews with Michael Collins. In doing so, he may have delayed the possibility of negotiations between the British government and Sinn Féin. Kerr's Catholic heritage also gave him special insight into Irish affairs, although this was complicated somewhat by his interest in Christian Science. It appears to have given him a certain prejudice regarding clerical intervention in politics and certainly his religious position mattered to those he was dealing with in

relation to Ireland. Kerr's interest in the United States, and his Catholic heritage, were both useful attributes for Lloyd George in delegating Irish matters to him.

Historians have so far failed to recognise that Kerr continued to address the Irish question as director of the *Daily Chronicle*. He defended the government's offer of dominion status to Ireland, while privately advising Lloyd George against it. Kerr believed that Ireland had to prove her loyalty to the Empire before such a solution could be attempted. Through exploring Kerr's work on the Irish question we also gain greater knowledge of Lloyd George's performance as a principal player. He was able to use every possible source to his greatest advantage, long before the Anglo-Irish negotiations of 1921. Kerr's qualities made him a valuable asset. The Prime Minister may have been able to push him in certain directions, whether through drafting legislation or his move to the *Daily Chronicle*. Yet despite this, Kerr was still able to exert his own influence. Kerr was not a statesman or minister in charge of dealing with Irish matters in 1917-21. However, he was an important presence in Downing Street and Fleet Street.

As a historical actor Philip Kerr has enduring relevance. Writing in 1960, J.R.M. Butler suggested that the problems that interested Kerr were still confronting the world at that time. Robert Brand, also writing in 1960, predicted that time would prove Kerr a visionary claiming that 'Philip's philosophy of international relations, and of world union, however difficult this may have seemed to some of us, may be shown in the future to have great relevance to the world of today'.<sup>1</sup> The world landscape has changed dramatically since 1960. Yet Butler and Brand's comments still hold some truth. Hotly debated topics, such as the transatlantic relationship, United Kingdom federation, and not least Ireland, were all major themes of Tony

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<sup>1</sup> R.H. Brand 'Philip Kerr: Some Personal Memories' in *The Round Table* Vol. 50 (June, 1960) p. 243.



Blair's premiership from 1997 to 2007. The contemporary relevance of the Irish question means that an in-depth study of Kerr's connection with it has been long overdue. The 1920 Government of Ireland Bill that he drafted remained as the basis for the government of Northern Ireland until 1972, and was not finally repealed until 1998.

As an interesting link to the story, Kerr's cousin, the Conservative M.P. Michael Ancram, the Thirteenth Marquess of Lothian, played an important role in the Peace Process of the 1990s.<sup>2</sup> As Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office from January 1994-96 he was involved in the beginning of the negotiations that would eventually lead to the 1998 Good Friday Agreement under the Labour government of Tony Blair. Furthermore, the after-shock of the 1920 Bill is still occasionally felt. In March 2009 two British soldiers were shot by dissident republican terrorists in Northern Ireland and a police constable two days later. As this thesis was being drafted in early 2010, the parties that share power in Northern Ireland, both Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party, went into crisis negotiations to strike a deal on policing in the province. The Bill that Kerr worked on envisaged eventual unity and was not designed to be a permanent solution.

There remains a sense of mystery surrounding Philip Kerr, perhaps largely due to his unconventional political beliefs, personal life and religious conversion. It is ironic, for example, that Michael Ancram is much that his cousin was expected to be: a practising Catholic, Unionist, and Member of Parliament. There is no doubt that Kerr was unconventional. Frances Lloyd George (nee Stevenson) wrote of him: 'He was the most unworldly person I have ever known...His clothes were always shabby

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<sup>2</sup> Ancram's full title is Michael Andrew Foster Jude Kerr, 13<sup>th</sup> Marquess of Lothian. As the son and heir of the 12<sup>th</sup> Marquess of Lothian he was known for many years by the courtesy title 'Earl of Ancram'. Due to the 1999 House of Lords Act hereditary peers no longer have the automatic right to sit in the Lords, therefore Ancram does not use the Lothian title in his public life.

and not too well fitting and his hats were a disgrace'. She also recalled that 'It was a terrible experience for him when at his mother's funeral the priest denounced him as a renegade Roman Catholic'.<sup>3</sup> Kerr was an enigma to his contemporaries as much as he has been to historians. As a final note it seems appropriate to record that little more than a year after his death, the diplomatist and politician, Harold Nicolson, recorded a meeting with Eamon de Valera in his diary. He wrote that:

He is a very simple man, like all great men. He does not look like a strong man, nor or there any signs in his face of suffering and endurance. Rather reminds me of Lothian in his last years. Deep spiritual certainty underneath it all, giving to his features a mask of repose.<sup>4</sup>

In view of his comments to Frank Pakenham described in the previous chapter, Kerr would almost certainly have disapproved of being compared to de Valera. But Nicolson probably did not realise just how apt the analogy was. De Valera has also remained something of an enigma and, as a historical character, remains open to constant reinterpretation. In his work *Chairman or Chief? The Role of Taoiseach in Irish Government*, Brian Farrell has suggested that de Valera was more important symbolically than he was politically.<sup>5</sup> De Valera never achieved his own personal vision of a Gaelic-speaking rural Ireland. Equally, Kerr failed to achieve his ultimate goal of a federated Empire. Like de Valera, Kerr was important symbolically too. His background and interests served a very useful purpose for Lloyd George in dealing with Ireland, representing a connection with Unionist, American and Catholic opinion. For better or worse Kerr was closely linked to the forces shaping an Anglo-

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<sup>3</sup> Frances Lloyd George, *The Years that are Past* (London, 1967) p. 105.

<sup>4</sup> Nigel Nicolson (ed.), *The Harold Nicolson Diaries 1907-1964* (London, 2005) pp. 290-291.

<sup>5</sup> Brian Farrell, *Chairman or Chief? The Role of Taoiseach in Irish Government* (Dublin, 1971).

Irish settlement in 1919-21 and this thesis confirms his place within the Anglo-Irish story.

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